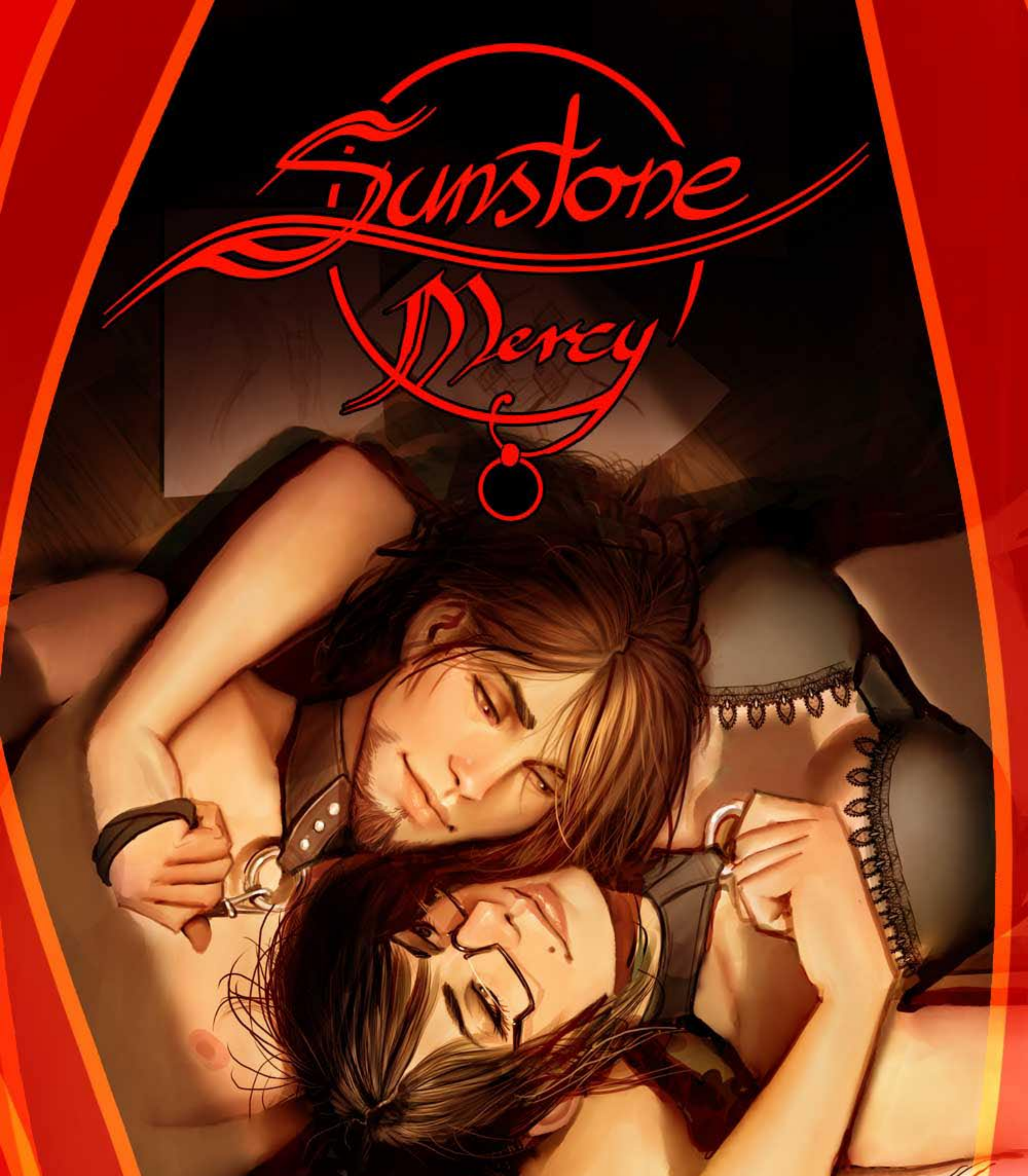
Sunstone

Mercy



SEE IF THIS SOUNDS FAMILIAR?

A COMPLICATED PAST TURNED A MAN INTO A BITTER CYNIC.

HE SPENDS HIS DAYS, GRUMPY AND ALONE...

IN COMES THE GHOST OF HIS OLD PARTNER WITH A GRIM WARNING.

TONIGHT YOU WILL BE VISITED BY THREE GHOSTS!

AND SO, A MISERABLE MAN IS GIVEN A CHANCE TO CHANGE. TO BECOME A BETTER PERSON.

EBENEZER SCROOGE, CHRISTMASS CAROL BY CHARLES DICKENS.

THERE WAS ONCE A TIME WHEN I STRONGLY RELATED TO THE CHARACTER OF OLD SCROOGE...

FOR... MULTIPLE REASONS.

I MEAN, TO SOME EXTENT, I GUESS WE ALL DEAL WITH OUR OWN GHOSTS OF PAST, PRESENT, AND THINGS TO COME...

DIFFERENT GHOSTS FOR DIFFERENT PEOPLE...

AS FOR ME, I'VE COME TO PERSONIFY MINE AS THREE IMPORTANT WOMEN OF MY LIFE...

WELL... ***FOUR*** IF WE TAKE INTO ACCOUNT ALLISON, MY PERSONAL JACOB MARLEY. LORD KNOWS SHE TOO WAS QUITE PROFFICIENT AT POINTING OUT MY FUCKUPS AS WELL AS RATTLING CHAINS AND SHACKLES.

AS FOR MY *GHOSTS*, THEY WERE NOT OF CHRISTMASSES...BUT OF *RELATIONSHIPS*.

AND YES... JUST LIKE SCROOGE, I TOO FEARED THE FUTURE.

I GUESS THAT'S USUALLY SO WHEN YOU SPEND YOUR TIME CLINGING TO THE MISTAKES OF THE PAST, AND YOU SUCK AT DEALING WITH THE PRESENT. FUTURE TAKES ON A RATHER GRIM SHAPE.

YOU MIGHT GET HURT AGAIN.

YOU'LL MOST LIKELY DESERVE IT.

AND THAT'S IT, REALLY. IN A WAY, MINE IS A STORY OF A MAN WHO LEARNS TO LET GO OF THE PAST, MAKE PEACE WITH THE PRESENT...

THAT'S FINE...

AND FINALLY...

I'LL TAKE MY CHANCES.

EMBRACE THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE FUTURE...

KHM *PFFT* FUCKING REALLY?

WHAT?

OH, NOTHING! JUST REALIZED I WAS HAVING TROUBLE DECIDING WHETHER THIS OPENING WAS DEEP, OR JUST PRETENTIOUS!

HEY, SCREW YOU! I'M TELLING MY SIDE OF THE STORY MY OWN WAY

FINE THEN!

LISA, YOU'RE THE WRITER! YOU'LL PUT ALL OF THIS TO PAPER! TELL ME! DEEP, OR PRETENTIOUS?

UH... A BIT OF *BOTH?*

I CAN WORK WITH BOTH.

BUT LISTEN!

THE MISSUS IS PREPARING A ROMANTIC DINNER TONIGHT, AND I HAVE NO INTENTION OF BEING LATE... MUCH.

SO, ANNE, ALAN... HOWZABOUT WE KEEP THE POINTLESS INTERRUPTIONS DOWN TO A *MINIMUM* AND YOU EACH TELL ME YOUR SIDE OF THINGS.

FINE!
START US OFF, SHAKESPEARE!
VERY WELL FAIR LADY. 'TWAS THE AUTUMN OF MY YOUTH...
GET BENT!
SIGH...
MERCY
THIS MIGHT TAKE A WHILE

ANYHOW... IT WAS AUTUMN...

SO YEAH!

UH...

HMMMM...

WELL?

...

SIGH

THING IS, I'M KINDA IN A VERY AWKWARD SPOT HERE.

LIKE...

ANY WAY I SPIN IT, THERE IS REALLY NO GOOD WAY TO TELL THIS PART.

IS IT BECAUSE... UH... I MEAN, YOU TOLD ME ANNE KNOWS ABOUT YOUR PAST?

OH... I KNOW!

YEAH, ANNE'S NOT THE PROBLEM. YOU ARE!

THIS FIRST PART IS ACTUALLY ABOUT ALLY AND ME...

AND, WELL... SHE'S YOUR WIFE, SO...

AWWW! LOOK AT YOU BEING UNCHARACTERISTICALLY RESPECTFUL!

OH FUCK OFF!

HEH! IT'S FINE, ALAN.

I MEAN IT!

ALLY ALREADY FILLED ME IN ON MOST OF IT.

IN FACT, HERE'S HOW WE'LL DO THIS. I WANT YOU TO TELL IT LIKE YOU ARE SPEAKING TO SOMEONE WHO KNOWS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING ABOUT YOU.

THAT GOES FOR THE BOTH OF YOU.

SO...

HOW 'BOUT IT? YOU DO THE TALKING...

AND I'LL DO WHAT I DO BEST.

TELL IT LIKE I'M SPEAKING TO SOMEONE WHO KNOWS NOTHING ABOUT ME, HUH?

YEAH... I CAN DO THAT.

WELL, I GUESS... IT STARTED WITH A SKETCHBOOK.

MY SKETCHBOOK.

ALAN YOU THERE?

HEY, CHRIS! YEAH, COME IN!

YOU GOING OR WHAT?

YEAH. I GUESS... SORRY I'LL BE READY IN A BIT.

UH... RIGHT! I GUESS I WOULDN'T BE TOO EAGER TO GO BACK EITHER.

YOU WANNA LIKE MAYBE SKIP TODAY? I DON'T KNOW.

UH...CAN YOU?

NAH, I'M GOING.

I SKIPPED *ENOUGH* DAYS ALREADY.

YOU'RE TAKING THAT?

UN-BRO-KEN

CLICK

YES.

UH...

WHAT'S WITH THE ARM?

...SO I'M PRETTY MUCH ALL PACKED AND MY OLD MAN GOES: HEY, CHRIS, HELP US LOAD UP SOME FURNITURE...

ALL GOOD AT FIRST, A FEW CUPBOARDS, NOTHING MAJOR, BUT THEN WE GOT TO THE DAMN BED.

MMM...

THEY SAID 3-2-1 TO DROP THE BED... I THOUGHT WE WERE DROPPING AFTER 1.

THEY HAD OTHER PLANS

YIKES!

I SCREAMED THE SAME THING FOLLOWED BY SEVERAL MOTHERFUCKS!

SERIOUSLY THOUGH...

YOU GONNA BE OK?

I GUESS WE'LL FIND OUT, WON'T WE?

CHRIS CONNELY WAS THE FIRST OF A VERY SHORT LIST OF FRIENDS I MADE DURING COLLEGE.

IT BEGUN AS A CHANCE ENCOUNTER. I WAS MOVING INTO THE SAME CHEAP STUDENT HOUSING BUILDING HE LIVED IN. HE SAW ME AND DID THE MOST CHRIS THING POSSIBLE... HE OFFERED A HAND.

HEY, BUDDY, YOU NEED SOME HELP

LL&P

HUH?

HELP? YOU NEED SOME? THAT IS, IF YOU'RE MOVING IN... AND NOT, LIKE ROBBING THE PLACE?

HEH, YEAH I COULD USE A HAND, THANKS!

I'M CHRIS!

ALAN!

THAT A STAR TREK SHIRT?

YEAH? YOU WATCH IT?

HERE AND THERE.

LL&P

FOR HOW IMPORTANT, AND AT TIMES UNEXPECTEDLY ODD OUR FRIENDSHIP WAS, IT HAD A VERY MUNDANE BEGINNING...

BUT THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH MUNDANE.

UH, ALAN... I REALLY HAVE TO GO NOW

HUH? OH, YEAH DUDE! HAVE A GOOD ONE!

I WOULD HAVE GLADLY GONE FOR SOME OF THAT BORING UNEVENTFUL STUFF BACK THEN...

WILL DO!

AND, UH... HANG IN THERE, OKAY?

YEAH.

THAT'S THE GUY...

BUT, UNFORTUNATELY, I WAS A BIT OF A CONVERSATION STARTER BACK THEN.

THOSE WEIRD PERVY DRAWINGS THAT KEEP POPPING OUT EVERYWHERE, THAT'S HIM

NAH, MAN! IT WAS SOME OTHER DUDES. I SAW THEM.

NO... I MEAN, YEAH, THEY'RE ***PASTING*** THEM, BUT THAT GUY ***MADE*** THEM.

YOU KNOW SARAH BENES? PHIL BOWLER'S CHICK?

NONE OF THEM RING ANY BELLS...

WELL, ANYWAY!. THE WAY I HEAR IT, HE LIKE, DREW SOME SKETCH OF HER... AND GIVEN HIS OTHER SKETCHES I CAN GUESS WHY BOWLER GOT BACK AT HIM.

I HEARD A DIFFERENT VERSION

BRO. I'M TELLING YOU GUY'S A FAG. HE HIT ON ONE OF BOWLER'S FRIENDS AND THEY GOT HIM BACK FOR IT.

JUST SAYIN', DUDE DRAWS TOO MANY CHICKS FOR SOMEONE WHO EATS DICK.

YOU DIDN'T SEE THE DRAWINGS?

WHAT DRAWINGS?

AAAWWW YOU MISSED IT!

GIVE IT A DAY THEY KEEP POPPING BACK UP.

SIGH...

SO THESE GUYS COPIED THE SKETCHES AND STAPLED THEM ALL OVER THE COLLEGE WALLS.

HAH! I WAS WONDERING WHAT THOSE THINGS WERE.

FUCKED UP, RIGHT?

OH, YOU POOR INNOCENT SOUL! I REALLY NEED TO INTRODUCE YOU TO WONDERS OF HENTAI!

DUDE, HURRY UP!

'SOKAY! I'M DONE!

SO YEAH... ***COLLEGE.***

MY FIRST MONTH THERE I WAS HARHSLY REMINDED OF AN IMPORTANT LIFE LESSON...

INTO SOME WEIRD

THERE WERE TWO SUREFIRE WAYS TO FIND YOURSELF THE CENTER OF ATTENTION

ONE: EITHER YOU DO SOMETHING AMAZING...

OR TWO: YOU EMBARASS THE SHIT OUT OF YOURSELF!

I WENT WITH NUMBER TWO...

NOT BY CHOICE, BELIEVE YOU ME

INTO SOME WEIRD SHIT?

CALL ALAN S/M BENSON!

SHIT

'SCUSE ME!

WU-HEY!

NOW, PEOPLE IN THE HALLWAYS HAD DIFFERENT NAMES FOR IT...BUT YEAH

I CALLED IT, *THE SKETCHBOOK INCIDENT.*

ALL THE RUMORS ASIDE, THE WHOLE THING WAS PRETTY SIMPLE. I WAS DOODLINE IN THE COLLEGE CAFFETERIA, WHEN SARAH BENES, A CHARMING GIRL I VAGUELY KNEW APPROACHED ME AND ASKED IF SHE COULD SEE MY DRAWINGS...

I DODGED HER REQUEST BY CLUMSILY OFFERING TO DRAW HER INSTEAD. SHE SAID YES. HONESTLY, THE WHOLE THING COULD HAVE JUST ENDED THEN AND THERE BUT I HAD NO SUCH LUCK.

AS IT TURNED OUT SARAH HAD A BOYFRIEND. A THIRD YEAR STUDENT WITH A CHIP ON HIS SHOULDER AND A WIDE CIRCLE OF FRIENDS..

POINT IS, THE WORD GOT AROUND THAT SOME DUDE WAS COZYING UP TO HIS GIRLFRIEND.

HE AND HIS FRIENDS STOLE MY SKETCHBOOK PROBABLY INTENDED TO BURN IT OR SOMETHING. HOWEVER, AFTER LOOKING THROUGH IT THEY FOUND OTHER USES FOR ITS CONTENTS.

THOSE VERY CONTENTS WERE THE CAUSE OF THE SHITSTORM I WAS ABOUT TO FACE.

A SKETCHBOOK IS A SORT OF AN ARTISTIC DIARY. AT LEAST I THINK OF IT AS ONE. AND IN MY CASE IT WAS A DIARY OF A YOUNG ***BDSM*** FETISHIST WITH A PASSION FOR DESIGN.

NOT A SIDE OF ME I INTENDED TO AS THEY SAY, *"SHARE WITH THE CLASS,"* SO OTHERS DID IT FOR ME.

I UNDERSTAND THAT THIS WAS NOT YOUR DOING, BUT I INSIST ON YOU... TAKING A LEAVE OF ABSENCE. AT LEAST FOR...

THE LADY FROM THE OFFICE OF STUDENT CONDUCT REFERRED TO IT AS A LEAVE OF ABSENCE... BUT YEAH I WAS BOOTED FOR TWO WEEKS.

TO GIVE IT TIME FOR EVERYTHING TO BLOW OVER, SHE SAID. SHE MEANT WELL...

IT DIDN'T WORK

AS IT TURNS OUT, JUST LIKE WITH HIGH SCHOOL, IN COLLEGE EMBARASSMENT HAD STAYING POWER.

TO MAKE THINGS WORSE, WHERE A SIMPLE INFORMATION MIGHT FADE, DRAWINGS WERE MORE PERMANENT, AND COPY INK BOUNTIFUL...

SO IT ALL TURNED INTO A JOKE WITH A SEEMINGLY ENDLESS SERIES OF PUNCHLINES. ACCENT ON THE PUNCH!

I BECAME A MEME. AN EASY AND EFFECTIVE WAY FOR OTHERS TO DISTRACT PEOPLE FROM THEIR OWN INSECURITIES AND FUCKUPS...

TO POINT AWAY, AND SAY: *"YEAH, I MESSED UP, BUT I'M NO S/M BENSON!"*

I GUESS, IN THAT WAY I MADE A LOT OF LIVES EASIER...

THIS SHIT WENT ON FOR OVER TWO MONTHS.

NOW, I'D LOVE TO TELL YOU THAT I SIMPLY EMBRACED THE LONER LIFESTYLE.

BUT, THE ROMANTICIZED NOTION OF A LONE WOLF WITH A *FUCK'EM ALL* ATTITUDE IS OFTEN JUST PRETENSE.

TRUTH IS, EXCLUSION, DERISION, LONELINESS...

CONSTANT MOCKERY...

THEY GET TO YOU...

WELL... AT THE VERY LEAST, THEY GOT TO ME.

TWO MONTHS MAY NOT SEEM THAT MUCH... BUT IT SEEMS LIKE FOREVER WHEN YOU'RE ON THE RECEIVING END OF IT...

LIKE I SAID... ALL OF IT GOT TO ME.

WHAT'S WITH THE ARM?

I WAS RUNNING WITH SCISSORS.

ANYHOW...

WHY AM I TELLING YOU ALL THIS?

CERTAINLY NOT FOR PITY SAKES...

NOR AM I TRYING TO SET UP SOME ANTAGONIST FOR MY COLLEGE TIMES. HELL, THE ORIGINAL CREW DROPPED THE JOKE SOON AFTER, BUT LIKE ANY MEME, OTHERS PICKED UP ON IT.

NO.

THE REAL REASON I TOLD YOU ALL THIS, BECAUSE I NEED YOU TO UNDERSTAND WHY I WAS THE PERSON I WAS ON THAT LATE NOVEMBER.

A SHIELDED, CYNICAL MISTRUSTFUL MISANTHROPE.

IN HINDSIGHT, IT SEEMED IT WOULD TAKE A MIRACLE TO SNAP ME OUT OF MY GLOOM...

?

AS IT TURNED OUT I DIDN'T NEED A MIRACLE... JUST A KINDRED SPIRIT WHO SPOKE MY LANGUAGE.
IS THAT A PONY-GIRL OUTFIT?

SO NATURALLY, WHEN SUCH A KINDRED SPIRIT APPROACHED ME...

UM... SORRY. I DIDN'T MEAN TO STARE. I...

I WAS JUST PASSING BY, AND IT SORT OF CAUGHT MY EYE

SURE IT DID...

I TOTALLY BLEW HER OFF.

AND I'M ABSOLUTELY SURE YOU DON'T MAKE IT YOUR HABIT TO POKE YOUR NOSE IN OTHER PEOPLE'S BUSINESS EITHER.

N-NO... I MEAN.. I DON'T...

UHUH...

WELL... I'LL BE ON MY WAY

I'M SURE YOU HAVE ALL THE MATERIAL YOU NEED FOR A NICE GOSSIP SESSION WITH YOUR CHEERLEADER FRIENDS.

NOW... I KNOW THAT SEEMED HARSH, BUT I HAD MY REASONS.

IN THOSE DAYS AFTER THE SKETCHBOOK INCIDENT, PRETTY MUCH THE ONLY GIRLS THAT WOULD GO NEAR ME, WOULD DO SO ONLY TO MESS WITH ME. USUALLY PRETENDING THEY WERE INTO THIS "BONDAGE STUFF"

THEIR APPROACH WAS VERY PREDICTABLE

YOU'RE THAT GUY THAT'S INTO LIKE, ROPES AND LEATHER AND STUFF?

YOU COULD SEE THEM COMING FROM A MILE AWAY.

S/M BENSON, RIGHT? LISTEN MY FRIENDS SHOE LACE BROKE. YOU GOT SOME SPARE ROPE?

KHM...

FUCK, WITH THEIR BARELY SUPPRESSED LAUGHTER YOU DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TO ***SEE*** THEM.

PFFF.... KHM... HEY!

IN THE END MY PATIENCE FOR THEIR BULLSHIT GREW THIN. AND MY SKIN THICK AND COVERED IN SPIKES.

SO, WHERE MIGHT A GIRL FIND A STURDY PAIR OF HANDCUFFS?

HAS THE GIRL TRIED HER PARENTS SOCK DRAWER? SHOULD BE RIGHT NEXT TO THE ANAL BEADS.

I ULTIMATELY STOPPED GIVING A SHIT. AND AFTER A WHILE THEY ALL KINDA STARTED BLENDING IN FOR ME

GUESS THAT'S WHY I'M HERE TODAY STRUGGLING TO REMEMBER HALF OF THEIR FACES.

THEN AGAIN, I WANTED THOSE PEOPLE WIPED FROM MY MEMORY

FADE AWAY THOSE DAYS ALTOGETHER...

I MEAN, IN ALL HONESTY EVERYTHING I TOLD YOU SO FAR WAS A PATCHWORK OF STUFF I TRIED TO FORGET. HELL, THAT MOMENT WHEN I ENTERED THE COLLEGE AND ALL EYES WERE ON ME... THAT WAS ABOUT A WEEKS WORTH OF BULLSHIT SUMMARIZED INTO A SINGLE MOMENT.

NOW, THE REASON I'M TELLING YOU THIS IS... I REMEMBER ***EVERY SINGLE MOMENT*** WITH ALLY.

BUT THAT'S ALLY FOR YOU. SHE MADE LIFE ***WORTH*** REMEMBERING

AND THE FIRST THING I REMEMBERED ABOUT HER... THE FIRST THING THAT STUCK WITH ME...

"IS THAT A PONY-GIRL OUTFIT?"

I KEPT THINKING ABOUT HER QUESTION. FOR A WHILE I COULDN'T EVEN PINPOINT WHY SHE WAS STUCK IN MY MIND LIKE THAT.

LORD KNOWS I DISMISSED OTHERS WITHOUT THINKING TWICE ABOUT THEIR DUMBASS OPENING LINES...

SO WHY THIS ONE?

IT WAS THE NEXT DAY I REALIZED WHAT IT WAS.

OTHERS USUALLY APPROACHED ME WITH VAGUE REFERENCES OF SHIT THEY HEARD IN AWKWARD JOKES ABOUT BDSM.

WHIPS, CHAINS, ROPES...

BUT SHE DID NO SUCH THING. SHE SAW A SKETCH AND IMMEDIATELY CALLED IT FOR WHAT IT WAS. A PONY GIRL OUTFIT.

THIS REALIZATION DID NOTHING TO CHANGE MY MIND. THE WAY I SAW IT, SOONER OR LATER ONE OF THEM WAS BOUND TO DO SOME RESEARCH TO FUCK WITH ME.

ONCE AGAIN, I HAD EVERY INTENTION OF FORGETTING THE WHOLE THING AND CARRYING ON WALLOWING IN MY PESSIMISM.

HI THERE! I THINK WE GOT OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT LAST TIME SO TO PROPPERLY INTRODUCE MYSELF, I'M ALLISON CARTER, ***ALLY*** TO MY FRIENDS!

ALLY, HOWEVER, HAD DIFFERENT PLANS.

UM...ARE YOU STALKING ME?

NO

...بسس

IT'S JUST THAT... WELL... I THINK WE HAVE SOME THINGS TO TALK ABOUT.

WHAT'S THAT SOUND?

CREEK...

CREEK...

OH...UM THESE CRAPPY CHAIRS ARE ALL CREEKY

YEAH WELL... IF YOU WERENT SQUIRMING SO MUCH...

ANYWAYS, I'M PRETTY SURE I'VE MADE MYSELF CLEAR BEFORE

I'M NOT INTERESTED IN TALKING TO YOUR TYPE, AND I REFUSE TO BE THE *FUEL* POWERING YOUR BITCHY *GOSSIP MACHINE* AGAIN...

YOU DON'T GET IT...

NO...YOU DON'T SEEM TO GET IT. GO LOOK FOR ENTERTAINMENT SOMEWHERE ELSE, I'M FRESH OUT!

...بسس

CREEK

...

OH FOR FUCK SAKE! WHATS YOUR MALFUNCTION? THIS SERIOUSLY CONSTITUTES HARASSMENT AT THIS POINT!

JUST GIVE ME ONE MINUTE OF YOUR TIME, AND IF YOU STILL WANT ME TO LEAVE BY THEN,I WILL DO SO. OKAY?

IF I STILL WANT YOU TO LEAVE?

OKAY, HERE, HOLD THIS

HUH?

A CAMERA?

OKAY *DUMBASS*... TAKE A PICTURE! AND HOPEFULLY THIS WILL MAKE THE MESSAGE CLEAR.WE DO HAVE STUFF TO TALK ABOUT....

OH, AND HURRY UP! I SERIOUSLY UNDERESTIMATED THE CAMELTOE I AM SPORTING UNDER MY JEANS

I... UM... WOW...

FLASH

SORRY I... PRESSED THE BUTTON BY ACCIDENT!

SUUURE YOU DID!

NO, SERIOUSLY, THE DAMNED BUTTON IS OVERLY SENSITIVE

KHM! COMPANY!

SSSHHH!!! THIS IS A LIBRARY!

THE TWO OF YOU TAKE YOUR ARGUMENT SOMEWHERE ELSE!

ARGH, FINE! COME ON, WE'RE LEAVING!

I TOOK HER HAND INSTINCTIVELY. MY MIND IN FULL PANIC MODE.

TRUTH IS, I WAS STUMPED.

PEOPLE MESSING WITH ME WAS SOMETHING I WAS VERY MUCH USED TO.

BUT THIS I WAS ENTIRELY UNPREPARED FOR.

THIS GIRL... I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF HER. THE POSSIBILITY THAT SHE MIGHT BE ON THE UP WAS ENTICING BUT MY EXPERIENCES WARNED ME AGAINST DROPPING MY GUARD.

SO YEAH... TO BORROW A LINE FROM CHRIS, WITH MY SHIELDS RAISED, I HAVE COMMENCED THE SCAN OF THIS ANOMALY.

FUCK ME, THAT SOUNDED DORKY!

W...

UH... WHY THOUGH?

KHM...

HOW ELSE WAS I GONNA GET YOU TO LISTEN?

I DON'T KNOW? TALK...

YEAH...UH, FAIR ENOUGH... I WASN'T MUCH OF A TALKER THE LAST TIME YOU TRIED... I MEAN I HAD MY REASONS.

I KNOW. I HEARD THINGS...

I KINDA FIGURED YOU WERE PROBABLY GONNA GIVE ME THE COLD SHOULDER AGAIN IF I JUST TRIED TALKING TO YOU...

HENCE THE... *SHOW DON'T TELL* APPROACH.

I REMEMBER A ROGUE SMILE.

AN HONEST SMILE THAT ESCAPED MY BITTERNESS AS I WONDERED: *COULD SHE BE FOR REAL?*

SO...DID YOU DO THAT ON YOUR OWN? YOU KNOW, THE ROPE STUFF?

YUP! THIS ROPE, A PRINTED OUT TUTORIAL, AND I HAD AN HOUR LONG DATE IN THE BATHROOM.

CONSEQUENTIALLY MY MOM NOW THINKS I'M HEAVILY CONSTIPATED SO THERE'S THAT.

HEH...

WELL... UM... CONSTIPATION ASIDE...

NICELY DONE!

WHY THANK YOU!

BUT UH, I STILL DON'T GET IT...

GET *WHAT?*

WHY GO THIS FAR JUST TO TALK TO ME?

REALLY?

DIDN'T YOU EVER WISH YOU HAD SOME FRIENDS WITH WHOM YOU COULD TALK ABOUT THIS STUFF?

NOW, THOSE SHIELDS I MENTIONED RAISING... THEY WERE A TRUSTY BARRICADE MADE OF 100% PURE COLD CYNICISM

FOR MONTHS IT WAS MY LAST LINE OF DEFENSE

IT KEPT ASSHOLES AT BAY.

THEY ONLY HAD THEIR FUN IF YOU LET THEM GET TO YOU.

OH, DON'T GET ME WRONG THEIR VERBAL BLOWS STILL STUNG ME, BUT MY SHIELD MADE IT SEEM LIKE I HAD NO FUCKS LEFT TO GIVE, SO THEY LOST THEIR INTEREST MUCH SOONER.

THIS BARRICADE OF MISANTHROPY HELD STRONG FOR A LONG TIME AND THEN... THERE SHE WAS.

KNOCKING ON THE PREVIOUSLY IMPENETRABLE WALL, TURNING IT TO GLASS

I COULD FEEL THE CRACKS SPREADING.

I FELT... VULNERABLE.

DESPERATELY, I HELD MY SHIELD UP FOR ONE LAST TIME.

I CAN'T IMAGINE YOU HAVE PROBLEMS FINDING FRIENDS...

I DON'T... I MEAN... FRIENDS IS A STRONG WORD...

NONE OF THEM REALLY KNOW ME. THEY KNOW *COLLEGE ALLY*.

COLLEGE ALLY LISTENS TO THEIR PROBLEMS, LAUGHS AT THEIR JOKES AND SHIES AWAY FROM SEX TALK BECAUSE SHE MIGHT SPILL OUT A LITTLE TOO MUCH, AND FREAK EVERYONE OUT.

I GUESS I REALLY WANTED SOMEONE IN MY LIFE WITH WHOM I COULD TALK ABOUT THE ***OTHER*** STUFF,

STUFF THAT *COLLEGE ALLY* KEEPS HIDDEN.

I DON'T KNOW... A FRIEND AROUND WHOM I COULD BE MYSELF. IN A WAY I CAN'T BE AROUND OTHERS...

AND YOU GOT THE IDEA I WAS THAT PERSON FROM SEEING JUST ONE DRAWING...

YEAH... I MEAN, THAT GOT IT STARTED...

UH, CARDS ON THE TABLE... I MADE SOME EFFORTS TO FIND COPIES OF SOME OF THE PIECES THEY KEEP PASTING....

A BUNCH OF PIECES...

LIKE... *MOST* OF THEM

YOU'RE *LEGIT.*

...

ALSO, SORRY.

CREEK.

CREEK!!

AND THERE IT WAS.

WITH A CREEK OF A ROPE, AND HOWLING LAUGHTER, THE LAST OF MY DEFENSES LAID BROKEN.

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A WHILE, I REALIZED... HERE IS SOMEONE I COULD TRUST.

AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MONTHS I FELT LIKE MYSELF ONCE AGAIN.

PFFFT!!!

BWAHA HAHAHAH!

OH GOD... HEH! THIS IS AWKWARD AS FUCK. ALLY, YOU WANNA GET SOME COFFEE OR SOMETHING?

OH HELL YES!

PREFERABLY SOMEPLACE WITH A DECENT TOILET... I REALLY GOTTA GET RID OF THIS ROPE ASAP... IT'S, UM... I DID A GOOD JOB...

A REAL GOOD JOB!

WAIT... YOU DIDN'T LIKE MAKE THOSE, YOU KNOW, KNOTS?

THE...UM... STIMULATING ONES?

NOPE...

UHUH... SO, DOES HUNCHING LIKE THAT MAKE IT BETTER?

UH... A LITTLE?

PFFFT....

OH SHUT THE FUCK UP! I DID THIS FROM A TUTORIAL AND IT WAS FINE UNTILL I WAS OUTSIDE THE BATHROOM.

COULDN'T JUST GO, HEY MOM, I KNOW I WAS JUST TAKING AN HOUR LONG SHIT, BUT GUESS WHAT! SECONDS!

FINE, FINE! LET'S GO FIND YOU A DECENT BATHROOM...

OH! ALSO, YOU GOT LIKE A PAIR OF SCISSORS OR SOMETHING? I KINDA RUSHED OUT AND FORGOT MINE

NO. I DO HAVE A BOX CUTTER

THAT'LL DO!

OH, ALSO HERE'S YOUR CAMERA BACK!

I MEANT FOR YOU TO KEEP THE PHOTO, YOU KNOW SO YOU KNOW I'M NOT HERE TO MESS WITH YOU.

NAH, YOU TOO ARE FOR REAL, ALLY.

SO... CAN I SEE YOUR SKETCHBOOK?

NOT ON THE FIRST DATE, I'M NOT THAT KIND OF A LADY!

AND SO, WITH THE SHATTERING OF THE LAST REMNANTS OF MY SHIELD, A NEW ERA OF MY LIFE BEGUN.

AN AGE I *WANTED* TO REMEMBER.

A TIME *WORTH* REMEMBERING.

WHAT?

TOO PRETENTIOUS AGAIN?

NO, ACTUALLY IT WAS ADORABLE!

SHE CAME AND MELTED YOUR ICY SHIELD

WITH THE MAGIC OF *FRIENDSHIP!*

PFFT...

YOU KNOW WHAT? I DON'T NEED THIS! *FUCK ALL Y'ALL!* I'M GOING FOR A COFFEE RUN. HAVE FUN ANNE! I'M TAGGING YOU IN!

OOH! GET ME SOME...

CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES! I KNOW.

OH, CRAP.. FORGOT TO ASK IF YOU WANTED SOME... UH...
I GUESS I'M A LITTLE SCATTERBRAINED WHAT WITH..
WELL, Y'KNOW...
HEH NO WORRIES, I GET IT!
MOMMY AND DADDY LOVED EACH OTHER VERY VERY MUCH AND NOW MOMMY IS A COOKIE-MONSTER
NOW, SHALL WE?
RIGHT... THE STORY.
SO... WHEN YOU ASKED ME TO DO THIS... I HAD TO THINK ABOUT IT A LOT...
WHERE TO START I MEAN.
SEE, YOU AND ALLY... YOUR ISSUE WAS WITH ALL THIS FEAR OF AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE...
BUT FOR ALAN AND I, THE PROBLEM WAS OUR PAST.
IT'S LIKE... OUR LOVE LIVES WERE A MASSIVE LANDSLIDE, AND FOR THE STORY TO MAKE ANY REAL SENSE WE BOTH HAD TO FIND THE FRIGGIN PEBBLE THAT STARTED IT ALL.
TURNS OUT... BOTH OF OUR PEBBLES WERE IN COLLEGE..
NOW, COLLEGE ANNE WAS NOTHING LIKE THE COOKIEMONSTER YOU SEE IN FRONT OF YOU.
OH NO! COLLEGE ANNE WAS A LITTLE GOTH, A LITTLE PUNK AND A WHOLE LOTTA METAL.
AND YET, CONTRARY TO MY APPEARANCE, I LACKED THE BROODING PERSONALITY OF A TRUE EDGELORD.
TRUTH IS, I WAS HAPPY.
OH COME ON!
I WENT WITH YOU TO THAT MUSICAL!
TECHICALLY YOU OWE ME!
TECHNICALLY IT WAS YOUR BIRTHDAY GIFT TO ME!
THE ANSWER IS NO!
I AM NOT GOING TO ANY METAL FESTIVAL!

MY POINT STILL STANDS. YOU HAVE EVERYTHING TO GAIN BY GOING WITH ME.

REASON NUMBER ONE:

METAL MUSIC IS GOOD FOR YOUR COMPLEXION!

THE EARTHSHAKING RIFFS USUALLY RESULT IN INCREASED ACTIVITY IN THE NECK AREA COMMONLY REFERRED AS HEADBANGING.

NOW, EIGHT OUT OF TEN DOCTORS AGREE THAT HEADBANGING INCREASES THE BLOODFLOW TO THE FACIAL AREA, I THINK WE CAN BOTH AGREE THAT WOULD HELP WITH THIS WHOLE *SPOTTED EGGSHELL* SITUATION YOU GOT GOING ON THERE.

RIGHT...

TEMPTING... BUT SIDEEFECTS OF SEVERE HEADBANGING MAY CAUSE THAT WHOLE ***BRAINDAMAGE*** SITUATION ***YOU*** GOT GOING ON THERE.

OKAY... REASON TWO! ***METALHEADS!***

SWEAT, BEER AND HAIR SHAPED IN A VAGUELY HUMAN FORM?

PASS!

YOU KNOW... YOU REALLY SUCK AT THIS WHOLE PERSUASION THING...

HEY, BULLSHITTING PEOPLE IS GONNA BE YOUR JOB. I'M AN ARTIST!

STILL... I GUESS IF YOU'RE NOT GONNA GO FOR ANY OF THOSE REASONS...

COULD YOU GO FOR ME?

PLEASE?

FINE... I'LL GO!

UGH... I'LL NEED EARPLUGS AND A TETANUS SHOT PROBABLY.

BUT I'LL GO.

HEY, YOU TWO, THE BREAK IS OVER. WE NEED YOU BACK INSIDE!

BUT YOU OWE ME!

OF COURSE!

BIGTIME!

SURE THING!

I KNEW SHE WOULD COME. I MEAN THAT WAS THE THING. WHERE ALAN HAD ALLY, FOR ME THERE WAS CASSIE.

SEE... WHEN I SAID I WAS TOO HAPPY TO PULL OFF THAT WHOLE EDGELORD VIBE, IT WAS BECAUSE OF HER.

A GOOD FRIEND DOES MAKE FOR A LIFE WORTH REMEMBERING.

THIS WHOLE GROWLING HEADBANGING THING OF YOURS IS SO NOT ME.

HEY, I'M JUST HOPING YOU MIGHT END UP LIKING IT *SOME DAY*...

BUT I KNOW YOU WELL ENOUGH NOT TO HOLD MY BREATH ABOUT IT.

GOOD.

AND YOU KNOW WHAT? THAT'S JUST FINE! YOU WERE NEVER THE HARDCORE TYPE

WELL... I WOULDN'T...

IN FACT, IF I HAD TO SUMMARIZE YOU I'D SAY YOU'RE JUST A *SMALLTOWN* GIRL WITH *BIGTOWN* DREAMS *STRIPPING* HER WAY THROUGH COLLEGE!

HEY, I'M *NOT*...

CASSANDRA, YOU READY?

ARGH

YES!

BY THE WAY I'M OUT OF ONES. I'M SURE YOU CAN BREAK A FIVE?

FUCK YOU, ANNE!

CASSIE CONNELLY.

MY BEST FRIEND.

KIND, LOYAL, FUN... AND VERY HARD WORKING

AND I MEAN IT WHEN I SAY HARD WORKING! LAW SCHOOL WAS EXPENSIVE AS FUCK. HER STUDENT LOAN BARELY COVERED THE COLLEGE TUITION. SO CASSIE WOULD PICK UP ANY PART TIME JOB SHE COULD GET.

NATURALLY, BEING A GOOD FRIEND I INFORMED HER OF AN EASY JOB POSTING FOR A FIGURE DRAWING CLASS MODEL.

SHE TOOK THE JOB, AND I TOOK EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO TEASE HER ABOUT IT.

THAT, AFTER ALL, IS WHAT BEST FRIENDS ARE FOR. THEY WILL HAVE YOUR BACK BUT YOU ALSO MAY FIND AN OCCASIONAL "KICK ME" NOTE ATTACHED TO IT.

CASSIE DIDN'T MIND... WELL... I MEAN, EVEN FI SHE DID, SHE FORGAVE IT ALL AFTER THAT UPCOMING SATURDAY.

TURNS OUT THAT THE METAL CONCERT I WAS PESTERING HER ABOUT, ENDED UP CHANGING HER LIFE... HELL, IT CHANGED BOTH OF OUR LIVES.

ALSO ON A CURIOUS SIDENOTE, TURNS OUT MY STORY ALSO STARTS WITH SOME ARTWORKS AND MY BEST FRIEND EXPOSING HERSELF. HEH... FUNNY THAT.

ANYHOW... THIS FRIENDSHIP THAT CASSIE AND I SHARED.

IT WAS AN UNLIKELY ONE FROM THE GET GO.

UNLIKE ALLY AND ALAN WE HAD LITTLE TO NOTHING IN COMMON.

SHE WAS A HARD WORKING STUDENT WITH HER EYES ON THE PRIZE.

I WAS A HIGH SCHOOL EDGELORD. FLUENT IN LANGUAGES OF CYNICISM, SARCASM AND 3 DIALECTS OF EYEROLLS.

OF THE TWO OF US CASSIE WAS THE HONEST ONE.

SHE WORE HER PERSONALITY ON HER SLEEVES.

ME? I WAS MORE LIKE A REVERSE ALLY. ALLY HID HER EDGY SIDE. I ARMORED MYSELF IN MINE.

I KEPT THE TENDER MUSHINESS ON THE INSIDE. WELL HIDDEN.

I WAS A GOTH LOBSTER IS WHAT I'M SAYING.

NOW, BELOW THAT DARK CRUSTACEAN SURFACE THERE WAS A CURIOUS KID CONSTANTLY SEARCHING FOR HERSELF...

...TRYING OUT ALL SORTS OF STUFF, BOTH GOOD AND BAD...

...BURNING THROUGH HOBBIES ON WHAT SEEMED A WEEKLY BASIS.

IN FACT, UP TO THIS DAY I COULDN'T TELL YOU WITH CERTAINTY IF I FIRST MET CASSIE DURING MY WEEK OF TRYING MARTIAL ARTS OR DANCING. BUT I MET HER DURING ONE OF THOSE.

OH... HEY... UH... WE GO TO SAME HIGH SCHOOL, DON'T WE?

THAT DANCE STUDIO/ DOJO WAS AN ODD KIND OF A NEUTRAL GROUND.

NEITHER OF US HAD ANY CLIQUE TO GO BY... TO CONFORM TO.

SO WE JUST... TALKED.

Broadway

OUR DIFFERENCES WERE NUMEROUS...

BUT... THERE WAS MUCH IN COMMON AS WELL.

SO WE BUILT ON THAT.

BEFORE CASSIE I DON'T REMEMBER HAVING FRIENDS. AT BEST I WAS A PART OF A CLIQUE OF WHAT PASSED AS HIGH SCHOOL EDGELORDS BACK THEN.

THE UNWRITTEN RULES OF A CLIQUE WERE SIMPLE. YOU DRESS ALIKE YOU ACT ALIKE YOU THINK ALIKE.

ONE OF US...

BUT THEN AGAIN THAT'S MOST GROUPS FOR YOU. YOU FIT IN OR YOU GET OUT.

MIND YOU, BACK THEN GETTING OUT SEEMED LIKE A TERRIFYING CONCEPT

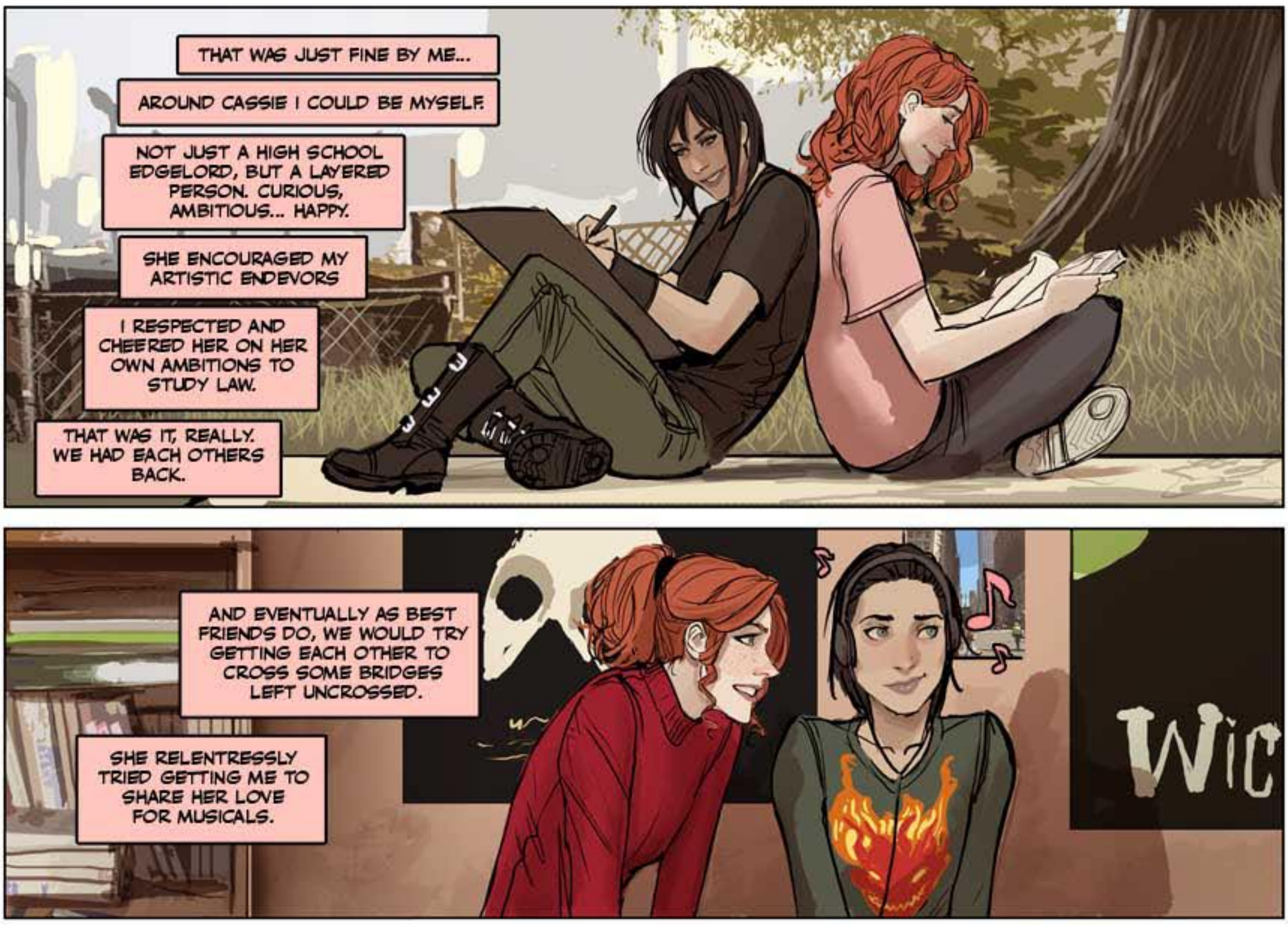
BEING ALONE IN HIGH SCHOOL KINDA FELT LIKE BEING AN ISOLATED WILDERBEAST IN A SAVANNAH. YOU KEEP LOOKING AROUND FOR THE TALL GRASS TO START MOVING.

I DON'T KNOW...AT LEAST I SAW IT THAT WAY. ANYWAYS, I STUCK WITH THE HERD FOR A WHILE.

AND THEN, ALONG CAME CASSIE.

I HAD A FRIEND... SO I LEFT MY CLIQUE. IN ALL HONESTY I COULDN'T TELL YOU IF THEY EVEN NOTICED.

AT BEST I WAS WAVED OFF WITH A SHRUG AND A WHATEVER...


THAT WAS JUST FINE BY ME...
AROUND CASSIE I COULD BE MYSELF.
NOT JUST A HIGH SCHOOL EDGELORD, BUT A LAYERED PERSON. CURIOUS, AMBITIOUS... HAPPY.
SHE ENCOURAGED MY ARTISTIC ENDEVORS
I RESPECTED AND CHEERED HER ON HER OWN AMBITIONS TO STUDY LAW.
THAT WAS IT, REALLY. WE HAD EACH OTHERS BACK.
AND EVENTUALLY AS BEST FRIENDS DO, WE WOULD TRY GETTING EACH OTHER TO CROSS SOME BRIDGES LEFT UNCROSSED.
SHE RELENTRESSLY TRIED GETTING ME TO SHARE HER LOVE FOR MUSICALS.
WIC
I KEPT LENDING HER MY METAL CDS
AND WHILE I COULD APPRECIATE HER CATCHY SHOWTUNES CASSIE NEVER LATCHED ON TO THE GLORY OF A GOOD POWERCHORD.
IT WASN'T UNTILL COLLEGE THAT AN OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED ITSELF FOR ME TO TRULY REACH HER.

SEE, AS IT TURNED OUT, ALL I NEEDED WAS A PROPER DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR THE METAL TO TRULY ENTER HER BLOODSTREAM.

NO!

BLOOD ANVIL

FUCKING!!!

BLOOD ANVIL

WAY!!!

BLOOD ANVIL

ARE YOU SHITTING ME RIGHT NOW!?

HEHEHE YOU'RE WELCOME?

IT'S TIME TO TRUST MY INSTINCTS, CLOSE MY EYES AND **LEAP!!!**

CLEVER GIRL!
WHAT?
YOU PLANNED THIS!
HEY, I DIDN'T NEED ANY PLANNING.
A METAL FESTIVAL LISTED A BAND THAT DOES METAL COVERS OF BROADWAY TUNES... IT'S LITERALLY LIKE, MY MUSIC AND YOUR MUSIC BUMPING UGLIES!
IF ANYTHING COULD GET YOU TO BANG YOUR HEAD, THIS WAS IT!
WELL, I'M STILL NOT FULLY SOLD ON METAL...
BUT I'LL ADMIT, THIS WAS FUCKING AWESOME.
THAT'S FINE
YOU SAMPLED THE GATEWAY DRUG!
AND NOW, STEP TWO OF MY MASTER PLAN WHICH I TOTALLY DON'T HAVE!
WE FIND SOME HOT METALHEADS TO DATE!
AGAIN... PASS!
OH FOR FUCK SAKE, CASSIE!
I'M SURE WE COULD FIND SOME NICE GUYS HERE, COME ON!
SURE, I MEAN THE SHEER *VARIETY* OF CHOICES IS *STAGGERING*!
WE COULD GO FOR A *LONG HAIRED* GUY WEARING *BLACK WITH* A BEARD OOOR... *WITHOOOUUT* A BEARD!

HEY NOW! I MAY NOT KNOW YOU BUT THAT, RIGHT THERE IS AN UNFAIR STEREOTYPE

THIS, OF COURSE COMING FROM A LONGISH HAIRED BEARDED GUY WEARING BLACK!

HEY, AS FAR AS METAL LONG HAIR STANDARDS GO, THIS IS MILITARY SHORT. ANYWAYS, HOW WOULD YOU LIKE IT IF I JUST WENT AND PRESUMED YOU TO BE AN IRISH POORLY TANNING.. VAMPIRE?

SAY WHAT?

TECHNICALLY, YOU COULD PROVE ME WRONG IF I WAS TO BUY YOU A DRINK...YOU KNOW... DEMONSTRATE THAT YOU CAN HANDLE MORTAL BEVERAGES

SO?

THAT'S A NO, THEN?

I DON'T KNOW HOW THIS ICEBREAKER WORKED FOR OTHER GIRLS BUT I PREFER NOT BEING INSULTED FIRST, THEN OFFERED A DRINK SECOND.

I DISTINCTLY REMEMBER YOU KICKING THINGS OFF WITH ALL METALHEADS LOOKING ALIKE.

THAT WAS A PRIVATE CONVERSATION!

YOU WERE SHOUTING.

YEAH, WELL, IF I'M SHOUTING, IT'S BECAUSE MY EARS ARE RINGING FROM THE MUSIC. AND ANYWAYS, I'M JUST NOT BIG ON METAL. SIMPLE AS THAT.

THEN WHAT THE FUCK WAS YOUR GEEKING OUT ON THE FLOOR OUT THERE ALL ABOUT?

OH, WHAT? A METAL BAND DOING A COVER OF ONE OF MY FAVORIE MUSICALS?

GEE, I WONDER WHAT MIGHT HAVE CAUSED MY GEEKOUT?

SO YOU LIKE MUSICALS?

YEAH... WHY?

JUST ASKING.

AND I'M GUESSING YOUR FRIEND HERE IS THE METALHEAD?

HELLYEAH!

WHAT STUFF HAVE YOU BEEN RECOMMENDING TO HER?

I DON'T KNOW, I'M VERY MUCH INTO POWER METAL THESE DAYS SO MOSTLY THAT.

OOOH, NOW THERE'S YOUR PROBLEM!

HAVE YOU BEEN KEEPING UP WITH SOME SYMPOHINIC AND SYMPHONIC GOTH METAL BANDS?

GOT A FEW ON MY *TO LISTEN* LIST...

WHY?

BECAUSE THAT'S HOW YOU'LL GET YOUR FRIEND TO GET INTO METAL

YOU START WITH SOME NIGHTW...

UH... 'SCUSE ME!

TWO OF YOU NEED SOME PRIVACY MAYBE? I CAN LEAVE?

NAH. SHE'S ALREADY A METALHEAD, IT'S *YOU* WE ARE TRYING TO CONVERT HERE!

BUT IF YOU'RE THAT SET ON LEAVING, HERE'S MY NUMBER. IN CASE YOU EVER WANT SOME NEW BAND SUGGESTIONS

WELL AREN'T YOU JUST INVESTED IN MY MUSICAL TASTES

YEAH... I'VE BEEN KNOWN TO GET A LITTLE PREACHY ABOUT THIS STUFF AT TIMES...

BUT I DO THINK YOU'D MAKE A COOL METALHEAD

NOW SEE? THAT'S A MUCH BETTER WAY OF FISHING FOR MY NUMBER! WELL DONE! WELL... ***BETTER*** DONE.

I'M NOT FISHING. I MEAN, DON'T GET ME WRONG. I DO LIKE YOU. I WOULD'T MIND GETTING TO KNOW YOU BETTER, BUT I'M ALSO A HUGE METAL GEEK. SO IN THIS CASE IT'S ABOUT THE MUSIC.

YOU... LIKE ME?

JUST LIKE THAT, HUH?

YOU SURE SEEM...

UM...

HONEST?

HEY, FOR YEARS PEOPLE TOLD ME I HAD NO POKER FACE AND COULDN'T LIE FOR SHIT.

I KNOW HOW TO TAKE A HINT

SO I JUST STICK WITH THE TRUTH. I MEANT WHAT I SAID. ALL OF IT.

I'M TOM. TOM WILSON.

CASSANDRA CONNELY.

UH... CASSIE.

HEY, CASSIE. YOU DON'T NEED ME HERE, DO YOU? THERE IS A NEW BAND COMING UP

I'LL BE FINE.

TOM HERE SWEARS TO TELL THE TRUTH THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

I THINK I MIGHT JUST CROSS EXAMINE THE WITNESS!

THERE IS A BORDERLINE RUDE THING CASSIE WOULD DO TO PEOPLE SHE HAD NO INTEREST IN...

SHE HAD AN UNCANNY ABILITY TO CONDUCT HOUR LONG CONVERSATIONS WITHOUT EVEN LOOKING AT THEM.

BUT WITH INTERESTING PEOPLE AND THOSE SHE LIKED...

SHE MAINTAINED EYE CONTACT.

I WASN'T SURE IF SHE WAS MERELY INTRIGUED OR GENUINELY INTERESTED IN THIS TOM GUY, BUT I WAS GENUINELY HAPPY FOR HER.

FUNNY HOW GOING TO A SIMPLE CONCERT COULD HAVE SUCH AN EFFECT ON SO MANY LIVES.

CASSIE MET HER HUSBAND...

TOM MET HIS WIFE...

AND ME?

I FOUND *MIRIAM*.

WE ARE UNBREAKABLEEE!!!

FORGED BY TORMENT SEVENTY TIMES

IT'S INESCAPABLEEEE!!

TONIGHT YOU'LL PAY THE PRICE FOR YOUR CRIMES

THE SONG WAS CHEESY AS FUCK...

BUT IT WAS THE GOOD KIND OF CHEESY, THE KIND YOU GET FROM MOST GLORIOUS OF POWER METAL.

I BRING YOU FIRE, BRING YOU PAIN ALL YOUR CRYING IS IN VAIN

IF YOU THINK I'M GONNA SHOW YOU MEEERCY....

NOW, I CAN'T DENY THAT A LESSER SINGER WOULD HAVE PROBABLY FACEPLANTED OVER THOSE LYRICS.

NOT MIRIAM, THOUGH...

SEE, A GOOD CONCERT IS MORE THAN JUST MUSIC. IT IS SEDUCTION.

IT IS AN ACT OF CAPTURING THE HEARTS OF THE AUDIENCE WITH MUSIC...

BETTER THINK AGAAAIIIIN!!!

WITH PASSION...

IN THESE MOMENTS OF RAW CHARISMA THESE SINGERS...

THEY SHINE.

PHEW

NOT EVERYONE HAD THAT POTENTIAL...

OKAY, HUFF... ONE MORE SONG

THAT ABILITY TO CAPTURE THE HEARTS OF THE AUDIENCE TO AN ALMOST EMBARASSING LEVEL.

THIS ONE IS FROM OUR UPCOMING STUDIO RELEASE

IT WAS THE *STAR* POWER

AND MIRIAM HAD IT IN SPADES.

IT'S CALLED

MARIANNE OF MY DARK HEART!

AND THEN... IT HAPPENNED.

MARIANNE,
OF MY DARK HEART,

I REMEMBER THE TIME
WHEN WE HOWLED AT
THE NIGHT

NOW YOU'RE GONE, AND
IT'S TEARING ME APART...

WE COULD NEVER IMAGINE
LOSING TO THE
MORNING LIIIIGHT!

SOMETIMES
THERE IS A
MOMENT OF PURE
MAGIC THAT YOU
CAN EXPERIENCE
DURING A
CONCERT.

IF YOU ARE VERY
LUCKY, DURING
THEIR MOMENT OF
GLORY, AS THE SONG
EXPLODES IN THE AIR,
A SINGER WILL BRIEFLY
LOOK STRAIGHT AT YOU.

AND ALL WILL CEASE TO
MATTER, BECAUSE AT THAT
MOMENT IT FEELS LIKE THEY
ARE SINGING TO YOU...
SINGING JUST FOR YOU.

THEN AGAIN,
MAYBE THAT'S
JUST MY WAY
OF SEEING IT..

I WILL ADMIT TO A BORDERLINE UNHEALTHY OBSESSION WITH SOME OF THE FRONTMEN OF THE BANDS I ADMIRED. LORD KNOWS THEIR CONCERT TICKETS TOOK UP MOST OF MY FUN FUNDS.

AND DURING EVERY CONCERT, I SECRETLY HOPED FOR THAT SPECIAL MOMENT

THE MOMENT WHEN THEY WOULD LOOK AT ME.

NOT SURE IF IT QUALIFIES AS A KINK BUT I'LL BE DAMNED IF IT DIDN'T DO THINGS TO ME

TRUTH IS, THOSE "SING TO ME" MOMENTS TURNED ME ON SO MUCH I COULD ALMOST HEAR AN AUDIBLE GULP... AND IT WASN'T COMING FROM MY THROAT.

THAT NIGHT HOWEVER, IT WASN'T SOME LONG HAIRED LEAN GUY CLAD IN LEATHER AND JEANS SINGING ON THAT STAGE. IT WAS MIRIAM. AND YET, IT FELT THE SAME. IN THAT MAGICAL MOMENT I LOOKED AT HER AND AS SHE GAVE ME A SECOND OF HER ATTENTION...

I FELT THE FAMILIAR WARMTH SPREADING, I FELT *THE GULP*.

AND AT THAT MOMENT A PECULIAR REALIZATION HIT ME.

HEH... HOLY FUCK!

I WAS BEING STUPID, OF COURSE

I NEVER HAD ANY INTEREST IN WOMEN BEFORE THAT POINT. I WAS SURE OF IT.

IT WAS JUST... UM... SPELL OF THE MOMENT... HER SPELL.

AND, OF COURSE, THAT WAS WHY THAT NIGHT I PLANNED ON... HOW DO I PUT THIS?

STRESS TESTING MY SEXUALITY.

YOU KNOW... WORK OUT IF THERE WERE ANY KINKS IN THE SYSTEM...

AND I FIGURED, WHAT BETTER WAY THAN VISITING A FAMILIAR PLACE.

IT WAS A WELCOMING FANTASY. ONE I WOULD AT TIMES INDULGE IN. IN IT, I WAS AN EAGER GROUPIE CALLED FOR A PRIVATE MEETING...

A BIT OF SEXUAL ESCAPISM I OFTEN REVISITED BUT IN REALITY HAD NO INTEREST IN PARTAKING.

PARTNERS WOULD OFTEN CHANGE

SINGERS

BASS PLAYERS

VAMPIRES...

DON'T JUDGE! IT WAS A PHASE...

I LOVED THIS FANTASY FOR ITS PACING. IT WAS MY SEXUAL HAPPY PLACE.

A WELL SCRIPTED AND THOROUGHLY REHEARSED SCENARIO

BUT THAT NIGHT THE ROLE OF A HAIRY STRAPPING MALE PROTAGONIST WAS PLAYED BY A SURPRISING UP AND COMMER.

I SLID INTO THIS SCENARIO WITH SURPRISING EASE.

WHERE ONCE I THOUGHT OF ROUGH HANDS TOUCHING ME AND BRISTLY FACES PLANTING KISSES, THERE WAS NOW SOMETHING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT.

A TENDER FANTASY

I IMAGINED LONG, SILKY HAIR CARESSING ME AS SHE MOVED

I IMAGINED HER SCENT, SMALL WHISPERS OF THAT WONDERFUL VOICE

DO I EXCITE YOU MARIANNE?

YES...

SHE REACHES DOWN, AND AS SHE DOES, SO DO I...

IN MY FANTASIES, HER HANDS FIND ME AS EAGER AS MY OWN DO.

AT THAT MOMENT I AM WAY PAST THE POINT OF TESTDRIVING MY SEXUALITY.

I SLAM THAT PEDAL TO THE METAL AND GO OFF ROAD..

AT A LATER POINT I WOULD FACE THE REALITY

BUT FOR THE MOMENT, THIS FANTASY INTERESTED ME MORE.

THIS SECRET WORLD I'VE BUILT FOR US... AND IN IT, WHERE ONCE HANDSOME MEN WOULD PERFORM IMPRESSIVE FEATS OF SEXUAL PROWESS, THERE WAS MIRIAM.

A WITCHY FELINE SEDUCTRESS

AND ME... I WAS MARIANNE OF HER DARK HEART....

AND SO I IMAGINE HER PLANTING A TRAIL OF KISSES ON ME. LOWER, AND LOWER, AND LOWER, UNTILL...

WELL... WHAT WAS THE LINE AGAIN?

MARIANNE, OF MY DARK HEART,

I REMEMBER THE TIME WHEN WE ***HOWLED*** AT THE NIGHT

AND SO I DID JUST THAT..

OH FUH-UUUHHHH---

I HOWLED AT THE NIGHT.

HHHAWWWWW!!!!

WELL.. I MEAN... IT *KINDA* SOUNDED LIKE HOWLING.

OH NO.
IT DEFINITELY SOUNDED LIKE HOWLING.

BUT HONESTLY, THAT'S WHAT MOST OF YOUR BANDS SOUNDED TO ME.
R--- RIGHT
HOWEVER, IT TURNS OUT THERE IS METAL MUSIC THAT I GENUINELY LIKE. SEE AMONG THE CDS TOM GOT ME TO LISTEN...
OH... SO... HE GOT YOU CDS?
HEH...WE SPENT MOST OF SUNDAY LISTENING TO MUSIC... AND... YOU KNOW... TALKING.
RIGHT. TALKING.
WELL... MOSTLY TALKING.
MMM-HMMM
SO... WHAT ABOUT YOU, ANYTHING INTERESTING HAPPENNED OVER THE WEEKEND.
OH... JUST... STUFF.
FOUND AN INTERESTING NEW BAND. LIKED THE SINGER. LIKE... A LOT.
HE'S HOT?
SHE IS.
AND ON A RELATED NOTE, TURNS OUT, I'M BI.
POLAR?
... SEXUAL!
UM... ANNE, I LOVE YOU, BUT NOT IN THAT WAY.
OH FUCK *RIGHT* OFF
HEY, I'M JUST BEING HONEST.
I DON'T SWING THAT WAY AND I DON'T WAND TO BREAK YOUR DELICATE LITTLE HEART.

OH HELL NO! I CAN DO SOOO MUCH BETTER THAN YOU!
OH, YOU WISH!

SO WHEN DID YOU FIGURE THIS OUT?
OKAY, YOU KNOW WHEN I LEFT TOM AND YOU ALONE AND...

MISS CONELLY, YOU READY.
ALMOST
COFFEE LATER, OKAY?
SURE!

OH, ALSO, ANNE?
YEAH?

TRY AND CONTROL YOUR ORGASMS, OKAY?

OH GOD, IT'S LIKE JACKSON POLLOCK GOT SHITFACED

BITCH YOU WANT ME!

HEH!

YOU WANNA HEAR SOMETHING FUNNY?

WHEN I TOLD HER I WAS BI, SHE COVERED UP.

I REMEMBER IT BECAUSE IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I EVER FELT DOUBTFUL ABOUT BEING HONEST WITH CASSIE.

FIRST TIME I REGRETTED TELLING HER SOMETHING.

IT WAS SHORT LASTING... BUT FOR THE FIRST TIME I THOUGHT TO MYSELF, WHAT IF I JUST LOST HER?

I ASKED HER ABOUT IT LATER THAT DAY... SHE LAUGHED AND SAID, IT JUST DIDN'T FEEL LIKE A *TITS OUT* CONVERSATION.

AND THAT WAS CASSIE IN A NUTSHELL

IN THE END, THE ONLY THING THAT CHANGED WAS THAT SHE NOW HAD AMMO TO FIRE BACK AT MY STRIPPER JOKES

AND SO... I WAS ONCE AGAIN MYSELF AROUND HER

I MEAN... THAT WAS WHY WE BECAME FRIENDS IN THE FIRST PLACE...

AND LORD KNOWS I WOULD NEED A FRIEND CAUSE MY LIFE WAS ABOUT TO GET NUTS.

I REMEMBER WAKING UP... AND SMILING.

THAT FELT... STRANGE.

I KNEW IT WASN'T THE WEEKEND. I LOVED WEEKENDS.

NO, THIS WAS, IN THE LACK OF A BETTER TERM, A SCHOOL DAY.

IT TOOK ME A MOMENT...

BUT THEN I REMEMBERED.

OH... THAT'S RIGHT!

I MET SOMEBODY YESTERDAY...

YOU SEEM IN A GOOD MOOD.

ALL THE GOSSIP BULLSHIT FINALLY SUBSIDING?

IT'S PARTIALLY THAT...

IT WAS TRUE. ALL GOSSIP HAD ITS OWN SHELF LIFE... AND MINE SEEMED TO BE HITTING ITS EXPIRATION DATE.

BUT THAT WASN'T THE REASON I SMILED.

NO, I SMILED BECAUSE OF A LIBRARY.

A PARK BENCH.

A COFFEE PLACE.

I SMILED BECAUSE OF A PERSON WHO MADE THOSE PLACES SPECIAL.

DUDE! *HUFF* *PANT*

SLOW DOWN!!! I CAN RUN BUT NOT *WHEEZE*

...NOT UP THE STAIRS WITH A BAG FULL OF BOOKS

ALLY?
YEAH! SO LISTEN, YOU FREE AROUND 1 PM?
UM... SURE?
OKAY, CAUSE WE GOTTA GO FOR COFFEE, I GOT THIS BOOK I READ LAST NIGHT...
SEE, I FIGURED IT WAS GONNA BE JUST A COOL FANTASY BOOK BUT THEN, BAM! THERE'S AN HONEST TO GOD DOMINATRIX IN IT!
ALLY, DON'T GET ME WRONG, I APPRECIATE THIS BUT...
YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS YOU KNOW?
DO WHAT?
YOU KNOW... HANG AROUND ME IN PUBLIC
I MEAN... YOU DON'T NEED MY REPUTATION RUBBING OFF ON YOU
TRUST ME ON THIS ONE..
YOU JUST MADE THAT SOUND DIRTY.
I'M SERIOUS, IF YOU STICK WITH ME OPENLY LIKE THIS, THEY WILL TALK.
ALAN!
WHAT?
FUCK THEM!
FUCK EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM!
HISTO
FUCK THEM ALL... IT WAS A FAMILIAR ATTITUDE. LORD KNOWS I EMPLOYED IT AS A SUIT OF ARMOR FOR LONG ENOUGH TO KNOW ITS FLAWS.

SEE, IT WAS TRUE THAT BY THEN MOST OF PEOPLE WHO MADE FUN OF ME, FOUND OTHER ENTERTAINMENT...

BUT GOSSIP IS A HYDRA. EVEN AS IT LAYS DYING I KNEW THAT ALLY AND ME SEEN TOGETHER COULD REAWAKEN IT, GIVE IT FIVE HEADS AND A STRONG PAIR OF LEGS TO STAND ON...

SO I DID THE ONLY THING THAT MADE SENSE TO ME.

I AVOIDED HER IN THE HALLWAYS.

MADE EXCUSES AS TO WHY WE WOULD ONLY MEET FAR FROM COLLEGE.

BUT YOU CAN'T ESCAPE ALLY.

NO MORE THAN YOU CAN ESCAPE THE GOSSIP

AND SO, INEVITABLY, PEOPLE STARTED APPROACHING ALLY WITH TOTALLY LEGIT "INFORMATION" ABOUT ME

AFTER ALL, A PERSON IN THE TOILET NEXT DOOR TOLD A CLASSMATE'S NEIGHBOR HOW DANGEROUS I WAS!

SHE NEEDED TO BE SAVED!

ALLY KEPT HER RESPONSE SHORT, SIMPLE AND TO THE POINT.

AND YET, I COULD NEVER SHAKE OFF THE FEAR THAT ONE DAY THEY MIGHT SUCCEED.

AFTER ALL, WE ALL HAVE A SNAPPING POINT...

AND THEN... WOULDN'T YOU KNOW IT, ALLY DID SNAP.

YOU SONOFA BITCH!

HEY! I'M TALKING TO YOU!

?

EXCUSE ME?

YOU FUCKING FREAK! WHAT THE HELL DID YOU *DO* TO HER??

COULD WE DO THIS WITHOUT YOU HITTING ME?

WHAT? IT ONLY DOES IT FOR YOU WHEN *YOU'RE* THE ONE DOING THE HITTING?

UGH... I GUESS THAT'S THE CURRENT VERSION OF IT...

LISTEN, I GOT SOMEPLACE TO BE SO CAN WE JUST CUT TO THE CHASE AND YOU TELL ME WHAT THIS IS ABOUT.

IT'S ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO ALLISON!

MY EX BEST FRIEND!

ALLY!? WH- WHAT HAPPENNED TO HER?

YOU HAPPENNED!!!!

I TRIED TO WARN HER ABOUT YOU AND... SHE...

SHE GOT PISSED OFF AT *ME!!!*

SHOUTED *ME* OUT!

SHE SAID YOU UNDERSTOOD HER BETTER THAN I EVER COULD!

AND THEN SHE BROKE UP OUR FRIENDSHIP!

THE REST OF IT COULD HAVE BEEN SPOKEN BY A PARENT FROM THOSE OLD PEANUTS CARTOONS FOR ALL I CARED.

BLAH BLAH MUAH....

HEY!!!

IT JUST DIDN'T MATTER...

THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERED WAS FINDING HER!

ALLISON CARTER

I KNEW SHE WAS FOR REAL SINCE THAT DAY IN THE LIBRARY.

EVEN SO, MY TRUST ISSUES KEPT HER AT ARMS LENGTH.

I WAS AFRAID THAT ONE DAY WITH ENOUGH MALICIOUS TALK, SHE WOULD GIVE UP... THAT THEY WOULD TURN HER AGAINST ME.

BUT THERE WAS ONE IMPORTANT DETAIL THAT I KEPT OVERLOOKING.

WHEN THEY TOLD HER OF HOW DISGUSTING AND PERVERTED I WAS... THEY MISSED THE MOST IMPORTANT THING...

SHE SAID YOU UNDERSTOOD HER BETTER THAN I EVER COULD!

SHE AND I WERE THE SAME.

AND THIS TIME SHE WASN'T JUST FLIPPING OFF SOME RANDOM NOBODY.

ALLY CHOSE ME OVER HER BEST FRIEND...

SHE HAD MY BACK.

AND I SURE AS HELL WAS GONNA HAVE HER'S.

I DIDN'T HAVE MUCH TO OFFER HER... BUT I WANTED HER TO KNOW THAT I UNDERSTOOD HOW BIG THIS WAS FOR HER..

I WANTED HER TO KNOW HOW BIG IT WAS FOR ME. THAT I TRULY APPRECIATED HER. TRULY TRUSTED HER..

AND THEN IT HIT ME...

BUT THAT...

THERE WAS ONE WAY I COULD SHOW IT...

JUST... FOR SAFE KEEPING.

ON THAT DAY, WE WENT FROM BEING FRIENDS TO BEING BEST FRIENDS.

AND THAT LASTED FOR EIGHT WONDERFUL WEEKS.

AS FOR WHAT HAPPENNED AFTER THAT... WELL...

I'LL GET TO THAT THE SAME WAY WE GOT TO IT. ONE SMALL VICTORY AT A TIME.

ONE PACK OF CHEWING GUM.

CHEWMINT

ONE BAR OF CHOCOLATE...

NOUGAT

TABOO CAGE

27

Special interview: Mistress Lexis Ravage

Stay silent! Stay still! Full body harness spec

Leia less

Budge your

ONE...

TABOO CAGE?

22.50

OH,AND A COPY OF NEW YORK TIMES.

YES.

WEEK 1 OF OUR FRIENDSHIP. WE BOUGHT OUR FIRST PORN MAGAZINE TOGETHER.

BOO CAGE

HEY... I DID SAY ONE *SMALL* VICTORY AT A TIME.

NOT A LOT OF DUDE OUTFITS THO...

I MEAN, THIS GUY HAS A GIMP SUIT?

AND SO DOES THIS ONE...

THIS ONE HAS A... T SHIRT.

OKAY, IS IT JUST ME OR DOES DUDE FETISH GEAR LIKE...REALLY SUCK?

YOU DON'T WANT TO GET ME STARTED ON THAT ONE.

TABOO CAGE

BY THE WAY... I WAS KINDA WONDERING?
ABOUT?
HOW DID YOU FIGURE OUT YOU WERE... INTO ALL OF THIS STUFF?
OH... THAT... I PRETTY MUCH TRIPPED INTO IT?
TABOO CAGE
SEE, WHEN I WAS A KID I KINDA SORTA CRACKED THE PARENTAL LOCK ON THE CABLE TV AND... WELL, I SAW THIS PORN.
WON'T LIE, IT FREAKED ME THE FUCK OUT BUT THE DOMINATRIX THERE WAS FUCKING GORGEOUS.
I DUNNO... I GUESS SHE STUCK WITH ME.
SO THAT'S WHAT YOU WANNA BE? A DOMINATRIX?
TABOO CAGE
I DON'T KNOW... MAYBE? LIKE, I NEVER REALLY GOT TO TRY IT...
I DID PICK MY HAIRSTYLE BECAUSE IT SCREAMED DOMME. SO THERE'S THAT!
HEH.
SO WHAT ABOUT YOU?
NEVER TRIED IT EITHER. I DON'T KNOW... FOR NOW I'M MORE OF A GENERAL BDSM FETISHIST LIKE YOU.
SO WHAT GOT YOU INTO IT.
BATMAN RETURNS. CATWOMAN.
DUDE! RIGHT HERE!
HEH!
THINKING BACK ON ALL OF THIS...
SHE TURNED MY LIFE UPSIDE DOWN

AND THAT WAS A GOOD THING.

UPSIDE DOWN WAS A WELCOME CHANGE TO WAKING UP WITH ANXIETY AND LIVING WEEKEND TO WEEKEND.

NOW, I LOOKED FORWARD TO MORNINGS!

TO COLLEGE.

TO SEEING ALLY.

EACH MORNING, I WOULD CATCH AN EARLY BUS, SO THAT BEFORE CLASSES I COULD GRAB MY MORNING COFFEE WITH HER .

AND YOU KNOW WHAT? SHE DID THE SAME.

YOU'RE OFF EARLY AGAIN?

RIGHT... SO DOES THIS "COLLEGE STUFF" HAVE A NAME?

YEAH, MOM... UH YOU KNOW... COLLEGE STUFF

YUP! ALAN!

SURE, WE BOTH HAD OUR COLLEGE STUFF TO DEAL WITH... THINGS TO DO... BUT NONE OF IT REALLY MATTERED.

NOT ANYMORE...

BECAUSE, THOSE WOULD END...

AND FROM THERE ON, THE DAY WAS OURS!

AND WE WOULD MAKE THE MOST OF OUR TIME TOGETHER.

BY WEEK THREE, ALL THE THINGS WE WERE ONCE EMBARASSED TO TRY ON OUR OWN...

YOU TWO BACK FOR MORE WEIRD PORN?

AND THE *TIMES*?

THEY GOT... EASIER.

NO *TIMES*!

JUST THE WEIRD PORN, THANK YOU!

EASIER BECAUSE TOGETHER WE WERE BRAVER.

TOGETHER, LIFE WAS FUN!

DUDE! STOP... EVERYTHING!

HOLY CRAP!

THAT'S ONE FINE LOOKIN' BOOT!

I NEED A CHANGE OF UNDERWEAR RIGHT ABOUT NOW!!

I MEAN, THERE ARE *FUCK ME BOOTS*...

BUT THESE... THESE ARE *FUCK YOU WITH A STRAP-ON* BOOTS!

THAT'S FROM THE ACCLAIMED FALL COLLECTION?

DILDO SOLD SEPARATELY.

WANNA GO IN AND TRY THEM ON?

I COULDN'T...

YOU KNOW, I ALWAYS WANTED TO TRY ON BOOTS LIKE THESE... BUT I ALWAYS FELT TOO EMBARASSED TO ASK.

HEH. PLUS IT TAKES LIKE A WEEK TO TRY THEM ON, WHAT WITH ALL THE LACING.

NAH, THE LACES ARE DECORATIVE. THE BOOTS ARE ACTUALLY STRETCHY.

SO NO TIME TO GRAB COFFEE?

NO, BUT YOU MAY WANT TO GRAB YOUR JAW OFF THE FLOOR!

CAUSE, DUDE! YOU ARE SO NOT READY FOR THIS!

I GIVE YOU THE REASON I'LL BE CRYING MYSELF TO SLEEP FOR THE NEXT WEEK OR SO!

YOU KNOW, THE WEIRD THING WAS... BACK WHEN SHE DID HER ROPE THING IN THE LIBRARY, I WAS TOO STUNNED TO EVEN CONSIDER THE WHOLE THING SEXUAL IN ANY WAY.

EVEN AFTER THAT, I GUESS I WAS JUST TOO EXCITED TO TALK TO SOMEBODY ABOUT THIS STUFF TO NOTICE IT...

BUT THAT DAY IN THE SHOE STORE...

I TRULY SAW HER.

I SAW THE WOMAN THAT WOULD ONE DAY MAKE A CERTAIN REDHEADED SUBMISSIVE WRITER KNEEL BEFORE HER.

SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK? DO I PASS AS A DOMINATRIX?

AND WHAT CAN I SAY... I WASN'T IMMUNE.

UH...YEAH... NAILING IT!

?

!

I----M GONNA TAKE THESE OFF, NOW.

MMM-HMM!.

SO...UH... YEAH. I SEE A PART TIME JOB IN MY FUTURE CAUSE, I GOTTA GET ME THOSE BOOTS.

BTW, ALAN, EVER BEEN IN THE BOYSCOUTS?

NO.

THAT'S ODD... CAUSE YOU SURE DO KNOW YOUR KNOTS...

ALSO, BOY CAN YOU PITCH A TENT!

UGH...

NOW, DON'T GET ME WRONG, I DIDN'T ALL OF A SUDDEN START FANTASIZING ABOUT ALLY OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT.

I MEAN, WE BOTH HAD OUR SEXUAL VENTS, ME, A BUNCH OF PHOTOS. ALLY, A BUNCH OF DOWNLOADED STORIES. POINT IS, NONE OF OUR SEXUAL FANTASIES AT THE TIME INCLUDED EACH OTHER.

BUT I WON'T LIE. WE WERE CHANGING.

WE WERE GROWING MORE AND MORE OPEN WITH EACH OTHER. COMFORTABLE AROUND EACH OTHER.

SHARING THINGS WE THOUGHT WE WOULD NEVER SHARE IN A MILLION YEARS.

SEE, AND IN MY CASE, IF I TRY IT WITH MY LEFT HAND MY BRAIN JUST REFUSES TO PROCESS THE MOVEMENT. LIKE I STOP MID STROKE AND THE HAND'S LIKE OKAY, HOW DID IT GO AGAIN?

PFFFT!

AND THEN THERE WAS ALLY. THE MORE TIME WE SPENT TOGETHER THE MORE COMFORTABLE SHE GOT EXTERNALIZING HER INNER FETISHIST.

AT FIRST YOU'D NOTICE HER WEARING MAKE UP MORE AND MORE OFTEN

THEN CAME THE CLOTHES. NO LONGER CASUAL, INSTEAD, ELEGANCE AND SEX APPEAL PERSONIFIED.

IT WASN'T FOR MY SAKE, MIND YOU. SHE JUST WANTED TO LOOK HOW SHE FELT LIKE ON THE INSIDE.

A DOMME IN THE MAKING...

A SPORADIC BONER ASIDE I HAD NO COMPLAINTS

IN FACT, I STARTED CHANGING AS WELL.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS BREEDS CONFIDENCE I GUESS AND TWO WAS CERTAILNY A BIGGER NUMBER THAN ONE. POINT IS, I WALKED TALLER, AND I SMILED MORE. I GUESS IT HELPED THAT A MONTH INTO OUR FRIENDSHIP WE WERE OLD NEWS. NOW, THAT'S NOT SAYING WE WERE COMPLETELY UNNOTICED. HOWEVER, THE RARE LOOKS THAT WE ATTRACTED FELT... DIFFERENT.

SO?

YUP...THOSE ARE SOME HOT STOCKINGS.

RIGHT? THE WAY I SEE IT IF I CAN'T AFFORD THOSE BOOTS...

HEY, HOW BOUT THAT BASEBALL?

LESS CONDESCENDING AND MORE... INTRIGUED. ALLY HAD A MORE COLORFUL WAY OF INTERPRETING IT.

DUDE! I'M TELLING YOU THEY WANT TO FUCK US!!!

DID I MENTION OUR JOKES ALSO GETTING RAUNCHIER?

BY WEEK SIX WE DECIDED IT WAS TIME TO FINALLY RAISE THINGS TO THE NEXT LEVEL.

AND BY THAT I MEAN, WE FOUND OUT ABOUT A SEX SHOP THAT CARRIED A STOCK OF BDSM GEAR SO WE DOUBLE DOG DARED EACH OTHER TO ENTER.

YOU FIRST!

NONONO, LADIES FIRST!

YEAH! LIKE I SAID , YOU FIRST!

FUCK RIGHT OFF!

UGH. TOGETHER!

BE-LING

OH, HEY THERE!

MADE UP YOUR MINDS ABOUT ENTERING, THEN?

UH.. YEAH.

WE'LL JUST BE... STUFF, LOOKING AT!

BROWSE!

OKAY, SO WE WERE A LITTLE AWKWARD ENTERING BUT... IT DIDN'T LAST LONG.

CAUSE, ONCE YOU ENTER, YOU REALIZE A SEX SHOP TENDS TO BE AN INHERENTLY FUNNY PLACE

DUDE! CO ED SLUTS 17!

PLEASE! HORNY MOMS 21!

THAT'S WHAT YOU CALL A FRANCHISE!

GOTTA LOVE IT HOW THEY LOOK NOTHING LIKE THE PICTURE.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT. IT'S OBVIOUSLY THE SAME PERSON, JUST VERY VERY SURPRISED.

IT'S...

BEAUTIFUL!

LATER IN LIFE WE WOULD BOTH CHUCKLE AT THIS...

BUT BACK THEN TO US THIS WAS OUR PERSONAL HOLY GROUND.

I MEAN IT WAS THE REAL DEAL!

ACTUAL BDSM GEAR!

HEY, REMEMBER OUR TALK ABOUT DUDE FETISH GEAR SUCKING?

YYYYEEAHH!

TRUTH WAS... WE WERE GEEKING THE FUCK OUT!

HEH, GIVE ME A BUNCH OF BELTS AND SOME LEATHERWORKING TOOLS AND EVEN I COULD MAKE THIS!

CALL ME WHEN YOU CAN MAKE ONE OF THESE AND YOU'RE HIRED!

HEH. I WOULDN'T HOLD MY BREATH

ALAN, IT'S A CORSET... I KINDA HAVE TO

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

MISTRESS CARTER, OR WHAT?

OH YEAH! THE PINK SWEATER REALLY COMPLETES THE LOOK!

HEY, FUCK YOU THAT'S DOMINANT PINK!

DOMINANT PINK? THAT'S A THING NOW?

SO? FOUND ANYTHING INTERESTING?

OH, HEY!

I'D LIKE TO KNOW THE PRICE OF... UH THESE?

YEAH, ALSO A PRICE CHECK ON THIS?

AMBITIOUS!

OH, HEEEY! YOU KNOW WHAT? THIS ACTUALLY HAS A PRICE TAG ALREADY! AND... UHUH! THIS MAY BE A BIT MUCH FOR ME.

HEY, SOME ELBOW GREASE AND A LOT OF LUBE AND...

YEAH... UH, FUCK OFF, ALLY!

HAVE A NICE DAY!

YOU TOO! YOU BOUGHT THE CONDOMS?

HEY, SOMEONE HAD TO BREAK THAT AWKWARD SILENCE!

HERE, YOU MAY FIND THEM USEFUL!

WITH MY REPUTATION? SURE... I COULD USE SOME WATER BALOONS.

UH... WHAT THE?

RIBBED, FLAVORED... GLOW IN THE DARK.

GLOW-JOB

RIBBED FLAVORED GLOW IN THE DARK

OKAY, I TAKE IT ALL BACK! THESE ARE SOME SERIOUS PANTY DROPPERS!

I HONESTLY CONSIDERED THROWING THE CONDOMS AWAY. TRUTH IS I WAS NEVER ONE OF THOSE, *"KEEP THEM HANDY AT ALL TIMES"* TYPES, I JUST LACKED THE SHEER OPTIMISM I GUESS..

BUT STILL I POCKETED THEM I GUESS I KEPT THEM BECAUSE THEY WERE FROM HER... THEY WERE OUR SCORE AND THEY WERE FUNNY.

JUST A NICE REMINDER OF A FUN TIME TOGETHER. HEH...

ANYHOW...

IT WAS ABOUT TWO MONTHS INTO OUR FRIENDSHIP... EIGHT WEEKS PASSED.

IT WAS THE DAY WHEN EVERYTHING CHANGED.

CALL ME MISTRESS!

I MAY NEED SOME PERSUADING...

WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG BY THE WAY?

YOUR FAVORITE BANDS?

FAVORITE? *YES*. BANDS? *NOPE!*

OKAY... SO THE PROFESSOR THAT TEACHES WEB DESIGN IS ALSO IN CHARGE OF NETWORK MAINTENANCE FOR THE COLLEGE.

HE HAD TO GO OVER A BUNCH OF COMPUTERS, REPAIR INSTALLATIONS, BASIC BUT TEDIOUS SHIT, RIGHT?

I'LL TAKE YOUR WORD FOR IT.

WELL...HE ASKED IF SOMEONE YOULD FILL IN. IT WAS ACTUALLY PAID WORK. NOTHING MUCH, BUT THAT'S NOT THE GOOD PART.

I SIGNED UP AND HE GOT ME ...

ADMINISTRATOR PRIVILEGES FOR THE ENTIRE COLLEGE COMPUTER NETWORK!

OKAY, YOU KNOW HOW YOU CAN USE THE INTERNET ON COLLEGE COMPUTERS BUT CAN'T REALLY ACESS OR DOWNLOAD OR INSTALL ANYTHING... YOU KNOW... *INTERESTING*?

KHM YEAH?

WELL... *I CAN.* AND *I DID.*

OH!

WAIT! SO THIS IS ALL...

BONDAGE PORN!

EEP!

I SHOULD CLARIFY... BACK THEN ALLY AND I ONLY HAD DIAL UP INTERNET... BASICALLY VERY VERY VERY SLOW OLDTIMEY INTERNET. POINT BEING, THIS WAS MASSIVE!

NOW... HERE IS THE PROBLEM. WE CAN'T WATCH THEM ON COLLEGE. CERTAINLY CAN'T DO IT AT MY PLACE, WHAT WITH MY MOM OR SISTER POPPING IN EVERY FEW MINUTES...

WE?

WE WHAT?

YOU SAID *WE* CAN'T WATCH?

YEAH! YOU, ME? POPCORN? ALL NIGHT BINGE?

YOUR PLACE?

OKAY, THERE ARE TWO PROBLEMS WITH THIS... BUT...

I THINK MAYBE IT'S DOABLE

BY THE WAY, YOU WANT COFFEE OR YOU WANNA JUST GO NOW?

NAH, I'M GOOD TO GO.

SO, COME ON, SPILL IT! YOU SAID TWO PROBLEMS?

WELL, THE FIRST ONE WOULD BE, I LIVE IN THIS HOTEL TURNED STUDENT DORM.

DUDE WHO OWNS IT HAS ONE BIG RULE FOR THE PLACE. ***GUYS ONLY!*** HE HAS PLANS FOR THE HOTEL AND DOESN'T WANT IT TO GET THE REPUTATION OF BEING AS HE PUTS IT, ***FRAT FUCKHOUSE!***

SO BASICALLY, WHAT I'M SAYING IS, WE'LL HAVE TO SNEAK IN.

OKAY, SO WHAT'S THE OTHER PROBLEM?

WELL... UH... I MEAN IF WE'LL BE WATCHING FETISHIST PORN, I'LL PROBABLY END UP PITCHING A TENT...

ACTUALLY, GIVEN THE SHEER AMOUNT OF PORN HERE, IT MAY BE AN ENTIRE CAMPSITE WORTH OF TENTS, I... DON'T WANT YOU TO BE WEIRDED OUT

FIRST OF ALL... I'VE SEEN YOUR TENT BEFORE!

AND, SECOND, IF THESE MOVIES ARE ANY GOOD YOUR CAMPSITE WILL BE NEXT TO MY OWN PRIVATE LAKE SO I'M NOT JUDGING!

A POPCORN SHOPPING LATER

YEAH! I'LL JUST SPEND THE NIGHT AT JENNA'S.

I KNOW, BUT IF I DO THIS ON MY COMPUTER I'LL LOSE THE WHOLE WEEKEND, JENNA'S COMPUTER IS A BEAST, SO WE'LL GET IT DONE FASTER.

EXACTLY.

OKAY, SEE YOU TOMORROW, MOM.

ALLY!

?

LET'S GO!

WELCOME TO MY MANSION, DON'T WANDER OFF, WOULDN'T WANT YOU TO GET LOST IN ALL OF THESE FIVE SQUARE FEET OF VASTNESS!

HEH! IT'S FINE. KINDA COZY ACTUALLY..

PIZZA

TABOO CAGE

OKAY! SO, I GUESS YOU GET COMFY, AND I'LL MAKE US SOME COFFEE. TO FUEL THIS BINGE OF OURS.

SURE. HEY, NICE... UH? TENTACLE GIRL POSTER.

NOW THERE'S A SENTENCE I NEVER EXPECTED A GIRL WOULD SAY IN MY ROOM.

LIFE'S JUST FULL OF SURPRISES, HUH?

!

UH.... ALAN? ARE THESE... LOCKPICKS?

OH YEAH. DIDN'T I TELL YOU? I PART TIME AS A BANK ROBBER!

YOU LITTLE BITCH! AND YOU HAD ME PAYING FOR YOUR BURGER ON TUESDAY!

FOR REAL THO! WHAT'S WITH THE THIEF KIT?

WELL, I USED TO HELP MY MOM AND DAD DO RESTORATIONS FOR THEIR ANTIQUE SHOP

THEY TAUGHT ME HOW TO PICK AND REPLACE OLD LOCKS ON CHESTS AND FURNITURE

KINDA WHY I PICKED ART AND ART HISTORY COURSES.

PLANNED ON CARRYING ON THE FAMILY BUSINESS.

IN FACT, WHEN I MOVED HERE FOR COLLEGE I FOUND A PART TIME JOB AT A NEARBY ANTIQUE STORE.

I MOSTLY DO THE SAME THING...

I DO MISS WORKING WITH MY FOLKS THO...

SO WHY DID YOU MOVE ALL THE WAY HERE?

I MEAN,YOU SEEM TO BE COOL WITH YOUR PARENTS

AND OUR COMMUNITY COLLEGE HARDLY SEEMS WORTH THE HASSLE.

MY OLD MAN'S IDEA HE INSISTED I SHOULD SEE THE WORLD AND GET A FEEL FOR LIFE ON MY OWN.

SO HERE I AM.

STILL... GOT TO MEET YOU, SO THANKS, DAD!

WHAT ABOUT YOU? I KNOW YOU LIVE WITH YOUR MOM

AND AN OLDER SISTER. DAD DIED FOUR YEARS AGO.

OH...

SORRY...

YEAH. ANYHOW, I DON'T KNOW... MY MOM IS GREAT AND ALL. I LOVE HER TO BITS, IT'S JUST... EVER SINCE MY DAD, YKNOW... SHE GOT LIKE SUPER OBSESSIVE WITH MARY AND ME. LIKE, COMPLETE HELICOPTER PARENT. AND NOW MARY IS 21 SO SHE GETS OFF THE HOOK, AND I USUALLY GET THE FULL ATTENTION.

AND THAT'S NOT A VERY CONVENIENT THING WHEN YOU ARE INTO... YOU KNOW... OUR KIND OF STUFF.

FUNNY THING IS, MY SISTER FIGURED ME OUT A FEW YEARS AGO.

AH YES. THE NIGHTMARE SCENARIO.

HEH... IT WASN'T THAT BAD. STILL... I LEARNED MY LESSON.

STARTED PASSWORD LOCKING MY PORN. CAUSE THESE DAYS, MY MOM USES MY COMPUTER OCCASIONALLY, AND THAT'S AN AWKWARD CONVERSATION I DON'T WANT TO HAVE. LIKE... EVER!

WAIT! HOLD EVERYTHING! YOU HAVE COMPUTER PORN?! I AM SHOCKED AND APPALLED AND...

HEY! RIGHT HERE, BUDDY!

HEH!

SO WHAT KIND OF STUFF DO YOU HOARD? I DO PHOTOS.

WRITTEN STORIES. EASY TO HIDE AND JUST AS HOT.

I GUESS WE'RE BOTH ABOUT TO UPGRADE THEN.

SO? WHERE DO WE START?

WE WERE TWO PERVERTS WITH A BAG FULL OF BONDAGE PORN

LIFE WAS GOOD!

AS FOR PORN ITSELF? IT VARIED IN QUALITY.

MUCH OF IT WAS UNDERWHELMING BUT AT TIMES FUNNY.

SOME WAS AT THE VERY LEAST A CONVERSATION STARTER

I DON'T MIND IT, IT'S JUST... I DON'T KNOW, GAS MASKS JUST NEVER DID IT FOR ME

I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, IN THEORY THEY KINDA WORK LIKE GAGS BUT VISUALLY... I DON'T KNOW, I THINK MAYBE WITH SOME MORE INTERESTING DESIGNS....

THEN THERE WAS THAT ONE WE WILL NEVER SPEAK OF.

OH GOD... I NEED TO BLEACH MY EYES!

I'M GONNA BE SICK!

I THOUGHT YOU SAID YOU PICKED THE BEST ONES?

HEY, I COMBINED TAGS AND RATINGS... NOT MY DAMN FAULT SOME TAGS WERE IN GERMAN!

THANKFULY AN OVER THE TOP CARTOON PORN MADE US FORGET THE UNHOLY...

SHE GREW A THIRD DICK!!!

LIKE...OKAY! NOW I LEGIT NEED TO KNOW ! HOW IS THAT ONE EVEN USEFUL?

LIKE... ONE IN THE PINK ONE IN THE STINK AND THIRD ONE TO CHEER FOR THE OTHER TWO??'

WE WERE HAVING A BLAST. IN FACT, IRONICALLY ENOUGH, THE THING THAT ULTIMATELY DERAILED OUR EVENING...

...WAS SOME LEGITIMATELY GREAT PORN.

WHICH ONE IS THIS?

IT SAYS: LADY IN THE IRON MASK.

OH, IT'S A PERIOD PIECE.

YUP! I'M BRACING MYSELF FOR ALL THE EDUCATIONAL HISTORICAL ACURACY!

TEN MINUTES LATER.

AH YES. THIS DOES SUIT YOU BETTER!

MMMPF!

"LADY IN THE IRON MASK"...
THAT WAS THE ONE THAT GOT TO US.

CLEVER AND INESCAPABLE BONDAGE, DELECTABLE FETISHWEAR, ACTORS CAPABLE OF SELLING DOMINANCE AND SUBMISSION...

AND, BELIEVE IT OR NOT, A STORY.
WELL... AT THE VERY LEAST A CONCEPT.

YES, EVEN THO IT'S NO HAMLET AND NOBODY WILL TAKE ANY OSCARS, AN EFFECTIVE NARRATIVE WILL TAKE YOU FAR.

I MEAN, YOU ARE ENGAGING THIS SHIT WITH YOUR DISBELIEF ALREADY IN FULL BODY HARNESS.
SUSPENDING IT TAKES MINIMAL EFFORT, REALLY.

AND THIS DAMNED THING NOT ONLY SUSPENDED OUR DISBELIEF BUT POURED HOT WAX ALL OVER IT AND HAD IT BEGGING FOR MORE.

MMMNF!

OH, COME NOW, YOUR MAJESTY. YOUR SISTER WILL TAKE GOOD CARE OF THE THRONE.

AND LOOK, YOU STILL GET TO WEAR A FETCHING CROWN FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

NOW, I CAN'T SAY WHETHER OR NOT WATCHING PORN TOGETHER DOES MUCH FOR VANILLA COUPLES BUT ALLY AND I WERE DANGEROUSLY AWARE OF THE MOOD SHIFT IN THE ROOM.

WHERE BEFORE THERE WERE CHUCKLES AND PUNS...

NOW THERE WAS ATTENTIVE SILENCE, BROKEN BY THE SOUND OF MOVIE, ALLY'S FIDGETING AND MY OWN CONCEALMENT OF THE BLATANTLY OBVIOUS

WE WERE BOTH AWARE OF IT.

SOMETHING WAS GOING TERRIBLY WRONG WITH OUR EVENING

SMILE, MY QUEEN, IT'S TIME FOR YOUR CORONATION.

TERRIBLY...

TERRIBLY WRONG.

I REMEMBER A LOT OF THINGS ABOUT THAT MOMENT. MY HEARTBEAT, OUR SWEATY PALMS HUNGRILY GRIPPING, HER BREATHING... AND THE FEAR...

WE KNEW, IF OUR EYES MET AT THAT SEXUALLY SUPERCHARGED MOMENT... THERE WAS A REAL CHANCE OF OUR FRIENDSHIP GETTING IRREPARABLY DAMAGED.

WE WERE BOTH ON EDGE. TINGLING AND PULSATING AND SOAKING... AND ALL THE SHIT THAT MADE OUR MINDS SCREAM, DONT LOOK AT EACH OTHER, NOT NOW!

IT WOULD BE...

LOOK AT ME!

MMMPH!!!

A MISTAKE.

I'LL ADMIT, YOUR LITTLE RESISTANCE WAS AMUSING... BUT YOU WERE DOOMED TO FAIL.

YOU KNOW, I AM HALF TEMPTED TO MAKE YOU WEAR THAT "CROWN" YOU INTENDED FOR ME...

BUT INSTEAD, I WANT TO SEE THAT INSOLENCE MELT FROM YOUR FACE, ONE ORGASM AT A TIME..

I AM A KIND QUEEN AFTER ALL... ALL I DEMAND IS FOR YOU...

TO *WORSHIP* ME.

ALLY?

SSH, PLEASE, DON'T SPEAK, I WANT TO HEAR HER MOAN. JUST... JUST DIG INTO ME...

I KEPT QUIET

MNNNUH!

YES!

MMH!

MMNH!

MMNH!

HMPH!

MMMNH!

MMH!

MMH!

MMMMWAH!

FOR A WHILE, THE ONLY SOUNDS IN THE ROOM WAS THE MOANING OF THE GAGGED ACTRESS ALMOST SYNCHRONIZED WITH ALLY'S OWN SURPRESSED MOANS.

ROUGHER! MNNH... DIG... DEEPER

AND SO I DID.

I FELT HER GRIP ON ME GROW STRONGER, MORE... DESPERATE.

MY ARM STRAINED AS ALLY TWISTED AROUND NEARING CLIMAX. BUT I KEPT DIGGING INSIDE HER...

AT THE SAME TIME HER LEG WOULD EVERY NOW AND THEN PRESS ON THE PILLOW IN MY LAP

NOT ENOUGH TO GET ME THERE, BUT DAMN IF IT DIDN'T SHOW ME THE NEIGHBOURHOOD...

AND THEN ALLY LOCKED UP HER WHOLE BODY, A SPASM. HER GRIP AROUND MY FINGERS, A VICE...

HER ONLY MOVEMENT, A REPEATED SHUDDER

A SURPRESSED SERIES OF DEEP EXPLOSIONS EACH FOLLOWED BY A SWIFT MOAN.

AND THEN... SILENCE.

I REMEMBER LUCIDITY CRAWLING BACK INTO MY MIND.

REMEMBER GENTLY PULLING MY HAND OUT

SHE FINALLY LOOKED AT ME ONCE AGAIN...

AND IT IS THEN THAT I GREW NERVOUS.

HUFF YOU ARE GOOD *HUFF* WITH YOUR HANDS.

WHAT DO I DO NOW?

SAY SOMETHING!!!

WELL... TECHNICALLY I'M GOOD AT LOCKPICKING.

AAAAAAARGHH!!!

OKAY.. UH... THAT CAME OFF WEIRD.

JUST... SHUT IT, ALAN!

WE'RE NOT DONE YET.

AAND THEN SHE DITCHED THE PILOW AND IN MY OVERSTIMULATED STATE I REALIZED I HAD A BIG PROBLEM. I WAS TWO GOOD STROKES AWAY FROM HAVING AN ACCIDENT.

OH SHIT!

OH SHIT!!!

OH THIS IS BAD!!!

SHE IS TOUCHING... OKAY! BASEBALL GAME BEING NARRATED BY MY OLD HISTORY TEACHER!...WHILE HAVING SEX WITH MY MATH TEACHER! DRESSED AS CLOWNS!!!

OH! HI, ALAN'S PENIS!

SO HERE'S WHAT I'M GONNA DO. I'LL REWIND THAT VIDEO, TURN OFF THE SCREEN AND THEN I AM GOING TO LISTEN BOTH HER AND YOU MOAN AS I RIDE YOU,

THAT OKAY WITH YOU?

LISTEN, BRAIN, WE GOT AN URGENT MESSAGE FROM PENIS! IF SHE TOUCHES US THERE NOW, WE'RE ABOUT TO MAKE A MESS!

STALL HER!!!!

OWH... KAY... I MEAN THAT IS... I'M COOL WITH THAT... EXTREMELY SPECIFIC PLAN

WHAT?

TODAY I WAS MADE AWARE THAT THE SOUND OF THOSE LADIES' GAGGED MOANING DOES THINGS TO ME.

GOOD, KEEP HER TALKING! AND THINK NONSEXUAL THOUGHTS!

AS IN: YOU WANNA BE GAGGED, OR DO THE GAGGING?

I SAID NONSEXUAL THOUGHTS YOU STUPID SACK OF...

STILL NOT SURE!

YOU?

UH...YEAH, KINDA IN THE SAME BOAT.

NOT SURE.

WEIRDLY ENOUGH, WE WERE BOTH LYING. IT WAS A STRANGE THING TO BE EMBARASSED ABOUT AT THE MOMENT, BUT THERE WE WERE. BOTH FULL OF SHIT. WE EACH SAMPLED THE TASTE OF DOMINANCE THAT NIGHT AND FOUND THE FLAVOR APPEALING.

SHE TOOK INITIATIVE, GUIDED ME, MADE ME PLEASURE HER.
AND ME... I HAD HER SATISFACTION IN THE PALM OF MY HAND. EVERY MOVE I MADE WAS MET BY HER RESPONSE... SHE WAS A DELICATE INSTRUMENT IN MY HAND AND I HAD THE CONTROL... AND SHE SAID... NO... SHE ASKED FOR ME TO BE ROUGHER, TO DIG DEEPER.
TRUTH WAS, BETWEEN DOMINANT AND SUBMISSIVE, BOTH OF US PREFERRED BEING A...

...DOM?

HUH?

A CONDOM, YOU GOT ONE, RIGHT?

AAAH! SHE'S NAKED!

BUT... THIS IS FINE! AT LEAST YOU ARE NO LONGER TWITCHING...

ALRIGHT!

DO I HAVE A CONDOM?

WE GOT THIS!

ALLY, I GOT THE CONDOM TO END ALL CONDOMS!

IT GLOWS, IT RIBS IT...FLAVORS?

GLOW JOB

HAH! YOU KEPT THEM!

WELL.. IT DID HAVE A RESONATING GLOW OF DESTINY AROUND IT!

OH, GOD!

I GOTTA SEE THIS!

CLICK

PFFFT!

OKAY, THAT'S JUST TRIPPY!

HEHEH! HEY, ALAN?

WHAT?

FWOOOM! FWOOOOM!

DAMN IT A--A-A-...

AND SO, WITH THE SOUND OF ALLY MIMICKING A LIGHTSABER, THE EIGHT WEEKS OF OUR FRIENDSHIP *CAME TO AN END.*

COINCIDENTALLY SO DID I, BUT THAT'S BESIDES THE POINT...

POINT IS, THAT NIGHT, SOMETHING NEW BEGUN.

SOMETHING CRAZY...

SOMETHING WILD...

SOMETHING...

AWESOMEEEEE!!!!

WOOOHOOOOO!!! MIRIAAM!!!

OH FOR FUCK SAKE WHO BRINGS GLOWSTICKS TO A METAL CONCERT?

HEH! HOW'S THAT FOR A SEGUAE?

ANYWAYS, IN CASE IT WASN'T OBVIOUS, I REALLY GOT HOOKED ON MIRIAM BACK THEN...

I ATTENDED EVERY GIG I COULD. IT DIDN'T MATTER IF THEY WERE SOLO ACTS OR OPENING NUMBERS FOR BIGGER BANDS, I WAS NOT GONNA MISS ANY OF IT!

IN FACT, FOR A WHILE IT SEEMED THAT MY LIFE REVOLVED AROUND COLLEGE, MIRIAM CONCERTS, AND EARNING MONEY TO ATTEND THOSE CONCERTS,

THAT WAS FINE WITH ME. IF MIRIAM WAS SINGING I WAS GONNA BE THERE. TURNS OUT, THERE WERE OTHERS THAT SHARED MY SENTIMENT.

MALEUS, THE HAIR OF SAURON.

SOME OF THEM I SAW SO OFTEN THAT I ULTIMATELY GAVE THEM NICKNAMES.

"MATH TEACHER" JANE.

MUTTONCHOP BOB.

AND... WELL... I DON'T NEED TO MAKE UP A NAME FOR HER... LAURA.

ALRIGHT I SEE SOME FAMILIAR FACES HERE!

I DIDN'T KNOW LAURA YET...

MIRIAM, MARRY ME!!!

BUT, YOU KNOW WHAT? I KINDA WANTED TO.

BEFORE WE SET THIS STAGE ON FIRE, I'D LIKE TO SAY A FEW THINGS.

WE STARTED SMALL.

A FEW FRIENDS WITH SOME INSTRUMENTS AND ME,

A FANGIRL OF BIGGER BANDS WHO COULD CARRY A TUNE.

WELL, I MEAN, MY MOM SAID I WAS GOOD!

HEH!

HAHAHAHA!

AND YET, HERE WE ARE, A CD ON THE WAY, CONCERTS... THE WORKS...

AND WE OWE IT ALL TO YOU!

AND FOR THAT I WAND TO THANK YOU!

AND I GUESS THE BEST WAY WE CAN DO THAT IS BY DOING THE THING!

SO, YOU BEEN A FAN O...

OKAY, I KNOW WHAT THAT LOOKED LIKE...

BUT I SWEAR, I WAS ADMIRING YOUR TATTOO

MHM.

NO, REALLY, I AM A MASSIVE FAN OF THE BAND YOU GOT ME BEAT

HEH, THANK YOU. YEAH I WAS INTO HER WHEN I FIRST MET HER THREE YEARS AGO IN A SMALL METAL CLUB

THAT WAS ALSO WHEN I DEVELOPPED A BIGTIME CRUSH ON HER

HEH! THAT SHIT'S CONTAGIOUS I SEE!

YOU TOO?

YYUP!

SO IS SHE... LIKE... YOU KNOW?

AS FAR AS I KNOW, NO, BUT THE WAY I SEE IT, SHE JUST HASN'T MET THE RIGHT WOMAN!

OH , AND I PRESUME YOU'D BE THE RIGHT WOMAN!

YOU BET YOUR ASS!

NOW, I KNOW SOME OF YOU KNOW THIS SONG!

WELL I JUST MAY HAVE TO FIGHT YOU ON THAT ONE!

AWWW! YOU'RE CUTE! WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

A SONG ABOUT A SPECIAL GIRL!

A GIRL CALLED...

MARIANNE!!!

BUT I USUALLY GO BY ANNE!

YOU'RE SHITTING ME?

NO, REALLY! MY NAME IS...

MAKE A WISH

OF MY DARK HEART!

I REMEMBER THE TIME WHEN WE HOWLED AT THE NIGHT

SHE SOUNDS KINDA AWESOME!

YYYUP!

ALSO SOUNDS LIKE THE TWO OF YOU REALLY HIT IT OFF. SOOO? DID YOU GET HER NUMBER?

OH, I GOT HER NUMBER...

AS YOU NOTICED, WE WERE HITTING IT OFF, SO I FIGURED, CARPE DIEM AND ALL THAT. I'M GOING ALL IN!

COME ON, I'LL BUY YOU A DRINK

AND TO MY RELIEF SHE SAID:

YEAH, WHY NOT?

I WAS ON TOP OF THE WORLD!

HEY, BUDDY! CAN WE GET TWO BEERS OVER HERE

AND THEN I TRIPPED...

I'M GONNA NEED TO SEE SOME ID FIRST!

PFFFFFT BWAHAHAHAHHAHAHAH

LAUGH IT UP, RED.

UGH! ALL THOSE CONCERTS AND I NEVER HAD ANYONE ASK ME FOR MY ID. THE ONE TIME I NEED TO IMPRESS SOMEONE, I GET DUDLEY FUCKING DO RIGHT TENDING THE BAR!

I BET THAT DIDN'T GO OVER TOO WELL

YOU THINK???

I'M NOT A KID!

LISTEN, KID!

RIGHT, UH... YOU'RE CUTE AND ALL BUT I'M 22. I'M NOT MESSING WITH ANY JAILBAIT!

JAIL... I'M NINETEEN!

RIGHT... HERE'S MY PHONE NUMBER. I DON'T KNOW...

I GUESS, CALL ME WHEN YOU'RE OLD ENOUGT TO BUY ME SOMEHTING STRONGER THAN A CUP OF COCOA...

OKAY?

SO YEAH... I GOT HER NUMBER

PFFFFFFFFFFTTTT

I SPENT THE NEXT TWO WEEKS WITH LAURA ON MY MIND.

CAN YOU BLAME ME? I WAS BI AND I JUST MET A HOT GIRL WITH SAME INTERESTS AND A DEVILISH GRIN WHO HAPPENED TO BE OPEN TO MY AWKWARD ADVANCES.

SURE... IT CRASHED AND BURNED BUT I HAD HER NUMBER AND I HAD AN IDEA HOW TO FIX IT.

BUT FIRST THING'S FIRST. THAT NUMBER...

LAURA, YOUR CE...

GOT IT!

UNKNOWN NUMBER...

HEH!

TOOK YOU LONG ENOUGH TO CALL...

I'M NOT SWITCHING TO YOUR SERVICE! NOW FUCK OFF FOREVER!

UH, LAURA? YOU OKAY?

YEAH... SORRY 'BOUT THAT. WRONG NUMBER

IT'S FUNNY HOW SOME PEOPLE CAN GET UNDER YOUR SKIN.

YOU DON'T WANNA THINK ABOUT THEM, BUT THERE THEY ARE, RUNNING LAPS AROUND YOUR MIND LIKE A CATCHY REFRAIN

ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST...

FRIGGIN MACARENA...

OR IN LAURA'S CASE... MARIANNE OF MY DARK HEART..

LAURA ONCE TOLD ME THAT MEETING ANOTHER LESBIAN IN THE WILD WAS A RARE OCCURENCE ON A GOOD DAY.

MEETING ONE WHO IS INTO THE SAME STUFF THAT YOU ARE AND IS COOL... THAT WAS THE UNICORN.

SURE, I WASN'T TECHNICALLY A LESBIAN BUT THE POINT STILL STANDS.

I WAS HER MARIANNE.

TRUTH WAS, HER TEASING ASIDE, WHEN SHE GAVE ME HER CELL PHONE NUMBER, SHE DID SO IN EARNEST.

SHE HOPED I WOULD CALL...

SHE WANTED ME TO CALL.

IN FACT, SHE WOULD HAVE ASKED FOR MY NUMBER IN RETURN IF THERE WASN'T FOR THE ONE BIG PROBLEM.

SEE, WHILE I TOLD HER I WAS IN FACT NINETEEN, I HAD NO ID ON ME TO PROVE IT.

NOW, I WAS OBVIOUSLY WILLING TO LIE ABOUT MY AGE TO GET A DRINK. IT WASN'T MUCH OF A STRETCH TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY THAT I MIGHT DO SO FOR OTHER TYPES OF PLEASURES.

IN THE END, LAURA WAS SURE OF TWO THINGS.

ONE: SOONER OR LATER I WAS GOING TO SHOW UP ON ONE OF MIRIAMS GIGS.

AND TWO: SHE HAD TO SEE MY ID.

LITTLE DID SHE KNOW THAT BY SHEER ***COSMIC COINCIDENCE***, I HAD THE EXACT SAME IDEA.

AND YOU THINK SHE BAILED ON YOU BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T HAVE YOUR ID?

I MEAN, SHE WASN'T REALLY SUBTLE ABOUT IT. AND I'M PRETTY SURE I KNOW WHERE SHE'LL BE TONIGHT!

SOOO... YOU'LL TO GO TO THIS CONCERT OF UH... MARY?

MIRIAM!

YEAH, THAT. SO YOU'LL FIND LAURA THERE, AND THEN THE PLAN IS TO SEDUCE HER WITH YOUR MATURE ELEGANCE WHILE SHOWING HER YOUR ID TO PROVE YOUR AGE.?

PRETTY MUCH.

YOU SHOULD SELL THIS TO HOLLYWOOD. THAT'S SOME TOP TIER ROMANCE

ALSO IS IT WEIRD THAT THE HARD SELL PART OF YOUR PLAN IS YOU LOOKING MATURELY ELEGANT AND SEDUCTIVE?

HEY, FUCK YOU I CAN BE ELEGANT AND SEDUCTIVE!

YOU WEARING YOUR ARMY BOOTS AGAIN?

UGH... SCREW IT!

MARIANNE, YOU GOT A LETTER FROM...

UH? YOU DOING OKAY THERE? YOU'RE NOT GONNA SPRAIN YOUR ANKLE AGAIN?

HEY I'VE GOTTEN BETTER AT THIS SINCE COUSIN BESSIE'S WEDDING!

A LITTLE BETTER!

IF IT'S ANY COMFORT YOUR MOM HATED THEM AS WELL.

HEH... IT ACTUALLY DOES HELP.

SO... IS THIS FOR SOME SORT OF A PARTY?

CONCERT. AND MAYBE A DATE...

DATE PART'S A BIG MAYBE THOUGH.

YOU GOT YOUR PEPPER SPRAY WITH YOU?

DAD...

ANNE, IT'S JUST A PRECAUTION.

I MEAN, HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE GUY?

ACTUALLY...

OKAY BEFORE I SAY ANYTHING ELSE, I NEED YOU TO UNDERSTAND SOMEHTING ABOUT MY DAD AND ME...

SEE, WE LOST MY MOM WHEN I WAS FOURTEEN.

FROM THERE ON IT WAS JUST THE TWO OF US. A FATHER AND DAUGHTER PATCHING UP THEIR SHATTERED WORLD. NEVER QUITE KNOWING HOW TO APPROACH EACH OTHER.

I WAS AN ANGRY KID FEELING CHEATED BY LIFE FOR STEALING MY MOM.

HE WAS A COP UNPREPARED FOR THE ROLE OF A SINGLE PARENT.

NEITHER OF US WAS HANDLING IT WELL

IN FACT, SOMETIMES IT SEEMED ALL WE EVER DID WAS ARGUE.

I GUESS WE HAD TO HIT ROCK BOTTOM BEFORE WE STARTED CLIMBING UP. AND I REMEMBER THE DAY THAT HAPPENNED.

SOME KIDS AND I BROKE INTO AN ABANDONED WAREHOUSE TO PAINT SOME GRAFFITI... I GOT CAUGHT...

DAUGHTER OF A COP ESCORTED HOME BY POLICE...

WE MUST HAVE YELLED AT EACH OTHER FOR OVER AN HOUR THAT NIGHT.

AFTERWARD, MY DAD LEFT THE APARMENT AND WAS AWAY FOR HOURS

SLAM '93

AFTER A WHILE I STARTED TO WORRY. ANGRY OR NOT, STORMING OFF WAS NOT HIS WAY OF DOING THINGS

AS IT TURNS OUT HE WENT TO MY MOMS GRAVE AND SPENT THE TIME THERE JUST... TALKING TO HER.

WHEN HE CAME BACK HE SAT DOWN WITH ME. HE HAD THIS STRANGE LOOK ABOUT HIM. STARTED SAYING THE WEIRDEST STUFF. TALKING ABOUT ALL THE MISTAKES HE MADE IN LIFE. HIS FUCKUPS, ALL THE EMBARASSING THINGS. THEN HE SAID:

WHEN WE KNEW IT WAS TERMINAL... YOUR MOM SAID: BILL, IT'S ALL YOU NOW. I NEED YOU TO PROMISE ME THIS! DON'T BE A COP TO HER. BE A FATHER. I GUESS SHE KNEW ME WELL.

WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY IS... UH... I HAVE TWO BIG FEARS IN LIFE, MARIANNE. ONE, IS THAT SOMETHING MIGHT HAPPEN TO ME IN THE LINE OF DUTY AND YOU'D BE LEFT ALL ALONE, AND FOR THAT I ASKED TO BE TRANSFERED IN THE EVIDENCE FILING ROOM. IT'S NOT GLAMUROUS BUT IT KEEPS ME SAFE

THE OTHER FEAR IS THAT I MAY FAIL YOU AS A FATHER AND BETRAY YOUR MOTHER'S TRUST. AND... I DON'T KNOW... MAYBE I HAVE BEEN TOO MUCH OF A COP WHEN YOU JUST NEEDED...

AS HE WAS SAYING THIS I REMEMBER THINKING SOMETHING FELT OFF. AND THEN IT HIT ME. HIS EYES WERE RED. I DON'T THINK I EVER SAW MY DAD CRY. BUT I KNEW THIS MUCH... THAT NIGHT HE CRIED.

AND SO I DID THE SAME I CRIED THAT NIGHT. I CRIED IN HIS ARMS, ALL PRETENSE OF AN EDGY HIGHSCHOOLER GONE.

THAT MOMENT I JUST LET GO OF IT ALL. THE PAIN THE RESENTMENT. ALL OF IT.

I HELD ON TO THE LAST VESTIGE OF WHAT WAS MY FAMILY, AND I HELD ON TIGHT.

NOW, MAKE NO MISTAKES! WE DIDN'T JUST MAGICALLY FIX YEARS OF ESTRANGEMENT WITH A SINGLE HUG, BUT IT WAS THE HUG THAT BLEW A HOLE IN THE WALL BETWEEN US. I STARTED SHARING. I TOLD MY DAD OF MY OWN FUCKUPS, ALLEVIATED MANY OF HIS OWN FEARS AND WE AGREED THAT NO MATTER WHAT, WE WOULD BE HONEST WITH EACH OTHER.

SO WE DID JUST THAT, AND BELIEVE YOU ME, IT WASN'T ALWAYS EASY.

BUT WE KEPT AT IT...

WE CHANGED. I CHANGED. AT SIXTEEN I STILL WORE MY EDGY EXTERIOR BUT ON THE INSIDE I WAS THAT CURIOUS KID JUMPING FROM HOBBY TO HOBBY.

AT SEVENTEEN I MET CASSIE

LIFE WAS GOOD AGAIN. AND WE OWED IT ALL TO A MOMENT OF HONESTY. WE BUILT ON THAT MOMENT. WE BUILT ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF TRUST IN EACH OTHER.

WE WERE A SMALL FAMILY. BUT A FAMILY NONE THE LESS

WHY AM I GOING ON ABOUT THIS? WELL, SOME OF MY REASONS WILL MAKE SENSE MUCH LATER, BUT FOR NOW I GUESS IT MIGHT HELP YOU UNDERSTAND WHY WHEN WHEN HE SAID THIS....

I MEAN, HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE GUY?

I TOLD HIM THIS

ACTUALLY I'M NOT.. YOU KNOW... DOING ALL THIS FOR A GUY.

OH.

IT'S FOR A GIRL.

WHAT CAN I SAY... BY THAT POINT IT WAS KINDA LIKE AN HONESTY TOURETTE'S.

HOWEVER, EVEN WITH ALL THE HONESTY BETWEEN US THIS WAS STILL SUPER...

AWKWARD

UH... THAT'S A NEW THING?

PRETTY NEW, YEAH.

HM... I DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT TO SAY TO THAT... UH... ARE YOUNG WOMEN LIKE YOUNG MEN WHEN IT COMES TO... THOSE THINGS?

BRING YOUR PEPPER SPRAY ANYWAYS.

AND YOUR CELLPHONE!

WAY AHEAD OF YOU, DAD! SEE YA!

TELLING MY DAD I WAS MEETING A GIRL WAS AWKWARD, BUT THIS? THIS SOMEHOW FELT WORSE.

I HAD JUST SPENT TWO DAYS OVERTHINKING MY CLOTHES, BECAUSE AT SOME POINT I IT HIT ME THAT I DON'T KNOW HOW TO ACTUALLY SEDUCE A LESBIAN. DON'T LAUGH! THIS WAS NEW TO ME

YES IN HINDSIGHT I'M WELL AWARE THAT THE FIRST TIME I GOT HER ATTENTION I WAS WEARING MY EVERYDAY CLOTHES. BUT THAT'S HINDSIGHT FOR YOU. IT ALWAYS ACES THAT EYE EXAM.

IN THE END I OPTED FOR THE DRESS AND SHOES I WORE TO MY COUSIN'S WEDDING AND KEPT MY FINGERS AND TOES CROSSED. FINGERS FOR THE LUCK, AND TOES CAUSE I COULDN'T WALK IN HEELS FOR SHIT

POINT IS... FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER I FELT LIKE I WAS STICKING OUT ON A METAL CONCERT.

NOW DON'T GET ME WRONG, IT WASN'T MY CLOTHES THAT STOOD OUT THAT MUCH. A LOT OF GIRLS WOULD BRING THEIR SEDUCTIVE A GAME TO THESE SHOWS. HEELS, CORSETS, LEATHER... METAL CONCERTS COULD AT TIMES EASILY BE MISTAKEN FOR A BDSM EVENT.

BACK THEN, HOWEVER, THAT WAS SO NOT ME.

MY JEANS AND JACKET WERE MY COMFORT ZONE.

MY ARMY BOOTS WERE MY FOUNDATION.

THIS... THIS WAS JUST WEIRD.

PEOPLE'S LOOKS FELT WEIRD, DRESS ALWAYS FELT LIKE IT WAS GETTING SHORTER BY THE MINUTE THE GROUND FELT WOBBLY, AND IF I WAS TO BE PERFECTLY FRANK, I WAS A LITTLE COLD .

STILL... I HELD ON TO HOPE THAT IF I FOUND HER IT WAS ALL GONNA BE WORTH IT!

AND YOU KNOW WHAT...

I DID FIND HER...

SO, WHAT DOES A GIRL NEED TO DO AROUND HERE TO GET A CUP OF COCOA FROM YOU?

AND IT WAS SO FUCKING WORTH IT!

MARIANNE!?

THAAAT'S A DIFFERENT LOOK!

DIFFERENT GOOD?

I... UH...

I THINK IT'S... CUTE.

CUTE?

YEAH! MY FRIEND'S DAUGHTER ALSO DRESSES UP IN HER MOM'S CLOTHES TO LOOK OLDER!

THE JOKE HIT A BIT TOO CLOSE TO HOME BUT SHE DIDN'T KNOW THAT, AND IT DID GIVE ME AN OPENING,

IT WASN'T SIMPLY A TEASE. IT WAS A CHALLENGE

UH...

MARIANNE?

YOU'RE A KID! CONVINCE ME OTHERWISE!

AND I WAS GOING TO BUT FIRST SOME PAYBACK

OKAY... WE'RE DOING THIS? YOU GONNA GIVE ME CRAP ABOUT MY CLOTHES??

BECAUSE HALLOWEEN IS A MONTH BEHIND US AND YOU'RE STILL IN YOUR JACK SPARROW COSTUME

OH YOU LITTLE BITCH!

HEY, IT'S NOT MY FAULT IF YOU MISSED THE VENUE! I BELIEVE ALESTORM IS PLAYING FOUR BLOCKS SOUTH!

I DON'T LISTEN TO PIRATE METAL!

REALLY? CAUSE YOU'RE A FRILLY SKIRT AWAY FROM BEING A BARMAID IN A SEEDY PIRATE JOINT!

FUNNY THING WAS, WHILE I WAS LOOKING FOR AN EXCUSE TO WHIP OUT MY DRIVER'S LICENCE, LITTLE DID I KNOW SHE WAS WAITING FOR THE VERY SAME OPPORTUNITY

!

YEAH? WELL I STILL WOUDLN'T SELL BEER TO YOUR UNDERAGED ASS!

NOT WITHOUT SEEING SOME ID FIRST!

AND WHEN SAID OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED ITSELF...

...WE BOTH WENT FOR IT

SUBTLE

OKAY, I MAY BE TOO YOUNG FOR A BEER BUT MY DRIVER'S LICENCE SAYS I'M OLD ENOUGH TO DO OTHER STUFF!

I'LL BE THE JUDGE OF THAT

MARIANNE MURPHY...

NINETEEN, HUH? DAMN... I GUESS KID'S ALL GROWN UP AND READY TO BREAK HEARTS

WELL, I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HEARTBREAK BUT I DO HAVE MY EYE ON A CERTAIN PIRATE BARMAID.

OH, DO YE NOW?

SO, WHAT'LL BE YER POISON, MATEY?

OH, GOD! NEVER DO THAT AGAIN!

YEAH, THAT WAS KINDA TERRIBLE.

IT WASN'T THAT TERRIBLE.

TO THIS DAY I REMEMBER THE MOMENT PERFECTLY.

LIKE EVERY TIME BEFORE MIRIAM CLAIMS THE STAGE AS HER OWN AND WE ALL JOIN IN HER CELEBRATION....

EI EI EI

I REMEMBER THE CONSTANT FEAR OF FALLING AS I JUMPED WITH THE CROWD

I REMEMBER LAURA'S ELATED SMILE

I REMEMBER MY HEAR RACING

I REMEMBER THE MOMENT MY NAME ECHOED THROUGH THE HALL...

MARIANNE! OF MY DARK HEART....

AND...

I REMEMBER THE TIME WHEN WE HOWLED AT THE NIGHT!

I REMEMBER THE PERFECT KISS.

AND FROM THERE ON MY MEMORY IS A BIT BLURRY.

IT WAS A SLOW TENDER START TO SOMETHING AMAZING.

UH.. YEAH...

MISTRESS...

UM...

PLEASE, MAY I COME?

AH... ALAN...

OKAY...

ASK ME!

MMMH...

ASK ME NOW!

MISTRESS...

I MEAN... COMPARED WHAT WAS AHEAD OF US ALLY AND I WERE OFF TO A SLOW... UM... NOT SO TENDER START AS WELL?

MAY I...
MMH... YES?
MAY... OH GOD...
SAY IT!
MA...
MNHHH TOO LATE!
OH, COME ON!
YOU SUCK!
HEY, THIS WHOLE ORGASM DENIAL THING DOESN'T WORK IF YOU KEEP HUMPING ME!
BUT... UGH... YEAH... FAIR ENOUGH,
STILL.. FOR A MOMENT THERE YOU REALLY GOT INTO IT, HUH?
IT WAS THE MOVIE...
SURE THING... "MISTRESS"

TWO WEEKS HAVE PAST SINCE OUR FIRST NIGHT TOGETHER..

TWO... INTENSE WEEKS

HEH...

SPEAKING OF MOVIES THO... YOU THINK WE GOT A PROBLEM HERE?

HEH...

MAYBE?

WE GONNA DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT?

THEY SAY ADMITTING THE PROBLEM IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS ITS SOLUTIONS

HOWEVER... WHEN WE MADE THAT FIRST STEP...

PFFFT...

WE WERE FACING THE WRONG DIRECTION.

FUCK NO!

ALL THE JOKING ASIDE WE NEVER SAW IT AS A PROBLEM

IN A WAY IT WAS OUR OWN PLEASANT ROUTINE BY THEN.

WE WERE TWO COLLEGE AGE DUMBASS KINKSTERS WHO SPENT THEIR FREE TIME TOGETHER TALKING, HAVING FUN AND WHEN NOBODY WAS AROUND WE WATCHED WEIRD PORN AND SCRATCHED EACH OTHER'S SEXUAL ITCH.

DUDE! STOP EVERYTHING!!!

THEY CENSORED THE DICK BY MAKING IT GLOW!

THE FUCK?

THE WAY WE SAW IT LIFE WAS GOOD

I can't. i'm working right now.

Ally: Working? Oh please! You're probably all alone polishing your wood as usual!

Ally: Also, look back!

AND REALLY, WE COULD QUIT ANY TIME WE WANTED TO.

DISCOVER YOUR SPACE AND MAKE IT YOUR OWN.

The power struggle

Dominant or submissive? Owning your space.

valentine's

4324364125

AM I A DOM, OR AM I A SUB, PERHAPS I AM SOMETHING INBETWEEN.

IT IS A QUESTION BEST ANSWERED BY EXPLORING AND OWNING YOUR MENTAL SPACE.

WHEN ENGAGING A SCENE DO YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE ABOUT YOUR ROLE, DO YOU FEEL ENTHUSIASTIC TO SLIP INTO IT.

TABOO CAGE

DO YOU EAGERLY WANT TO BE RESTRAINED? DOES IT HELP YOU SINK DEEPER INTO YOUR ROLE WHERE YOU TRULY SUBMIT TO YOUR DOMINANT?

DO YOU FIND YOURSELF EASILY ASSERTING YOUR WILL OVER YOUR SUBMISSIVE PARTNER, DOES SLIPPING INTO THAT STATE OF MIND COME QUICKLY AND WITH LITTLE EFFORT?

DO YOU FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE IN YOUR DOMSPACE, OR YOUR SUBSPACE?

THIS TEST IS HERE TO HELP YOU ANSWER THOSE QUESTIONS.

CAGE

Dominant or submissive? Owning your space?

valentine's day price guide

WELL SHIT, IT'S A TEST IN A PORN MAGAZINE. SEEMS LIKE LEGIT SCIENCE TO ME.

HEH...

...

UM SO... YOU FREE THIS FRIDAY NIGHT?

NO... I TOOK ON SOME EXTRA WORK AT THE ANTIQUE SHOP.

OH...

I HAVE THURSDAY OFF? THAT WORK FOR YOU?

ALLY?

YOU WANNA... LIKE... TRY IT?

TAROTAGE

THE TEST?

YEAH, I MEAN NO! NOT THE MAGAZINE ONE... YOU WANNA LIKE TRY IT FOR REAL.

OH... LIKE... YOU AND ME.... BDSM?

UH... YEAH?

I MEAN I DON'T WANNA PUSH...

NONO, IT'S NOT THAT! IT'S JUST LIKE... WOW... NOT REALLY SOMETHING I EVER EXPECTED ANYONE TO LIKE PUT ON THE TABLE, YOU KNOW? UH...

OKAY... UH SO... THAT A YES OR NO?

CAUSE I'M KINDA FREAKING OUT INTERNALLY RIGHT NOW

NO NEED. I'M IN!

YOU MEAN IT?

YEAH! LET'S DO IT!

LIKE I SAID, WE COULD QUIT ANY TIME WE WANTED TO.

IT'S JUST...

WE REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO.

HEH... WELL I GUESS WE GOT SOME SHOPPING TO DO!

I GUESS WE DO!

BUYING PROPS FOR A BDSM SESSION IS ALMOST LIKE A FOREPLAY OF ITS OWN.

THESE ARE MORE THAN JUST THINGS YOU ARE BUYING. THEY ARE BUILDING BLOCKS TO SITUATIONS. PLOTPOINTS TO SCENARIOS. THEY ARE SEGMENTS OF CRAZY ENTICING IDEAS

THE EXCITEMENT WHEN YOU FIND JUST THE RIGHT THING I'D IMAGINE RIVALS A SCULPTOR FINDING A PERFECT PIECE OF MARBLE BRIMMING WITH UNDEFINED POTENTIAL.

THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT THESE THINGS REPRESENTED FOR US. POTENTIAL.

AND LIKE THE AFOREMENTIONED SCULPTOR, WE WERE OUT IN THE WILD LOOKING FOR JUST THE RIGHT MARBLE.

AND WE HAD A FEW VERY SPECIFIC QUARRIES IN MIND

OH AND ALSO THE RUBBER BALLS! OUR PEANUT LOVES THESE!

HAPPY PAW

PET STORE

YUP... WHEN YOU'RE AN ADULT WITH A FETISH AND DISPOSABLE INCOME, YOU'D MAKE YOUR WAY TO A SEX SHOP OR NOWADAYS JUST ORDER STUFF IN...

WE, HOWEVER WERE COLLEGE STUDENTS ON A TIGHT BUDGET. SO TIGHT THAT ALLY HAD ONE PAIR OF SEXY STOCKINGS WHICH SHE ALWAYS MADE SURE I WAS CAREFUL WITH

WE IMPROVISED. PET STORES, GENERAL STORES HARDWARE STORES, YOU NAME IT. WE WERE THERE LOOKING THROUGH THEIR STOCK WITH A DIFFERENT MINDSET

TO THIS DAY I REMEMBER THESE "SCAVENGER HUNTS" FONDLY. PICKING RANDOM THINGS, MUNDANE STUFF TO PEOPLE AROUND US...

?

AND SEEING THEM IN A DIFFERENT, EXCITING WAY.

AND THE FUN OF IT WAS, NOBODY HAD ANY IDEA

NOBODY SUSPECTED A THING.

20% OFF

OUR THURSDAY EVENING PLANS WERE LOOKING GOOD.

FOUR ACRYLIC SPRAYS... THAT ALL?

YUP!

WE HAVE MASKING TAPE ON SALE

NO, I'M STILL GOOD ON THAT.

ALRIGHT. TWENTY TWO BUCKS IT IS.

OH, AND BILL! NOW DON'T GO VANDALIZING PUBLIC PROPERTY WITH THOSE OKAY?

HILARIOUS, FRANK!

HEH! HEY THERE!

HI! SO WE'LL TAKE THESE AND WE'LL NEED A BAG AS WELL

SURE THING. OKAY, SO, SYNTHETIC ROPE, 40 FT.

HEMP ROPE... 15 FT.

...DUCT TAPE

JUST THE ROPES AND DUCT TAPE?
YUP!
YOU GOT IT! HEH! SO...YOU TWO EITHER PLANNING A KIDNAPPING OR A REALLY WILD THURSDAY NIGHT?
SAYWHATNOW?
TH-THURSDAY? WHY... UH, HOW.. WHY THURDAY?
THURSDAY IS VALENTINE'S DAY?
ROPES? DUCT TAPE? BIT OF WILD FUN? NOTHING?
UH.. LISTEN... DON'T MIND ME. IT'S A BORING JOB AND I MAKE BAD JOKES.
OH... RIGHT... NO, IT'S FINE! VALENTINE'S DAY...
THAT'S THIS THURSDAY...
TOTALLY!
RIGHT...
YEAH, ANYHOW THAT'LL BE THIRTY FOUR BUCKS
FOR YEARS WE BOUGHT THINGS LIKE ROPES TAPES, AND SIMILAR STUFF IN YOUR REGULAR STORES. JOKING OR NOT, THIS WAS THE ONLY TIME ANYONE GUESSED IT RIGHT.
HOWEVER, THIS WAS NOT WHY WE WERE BOTH STANDING AWKWARDLY FROZEN IN FRONT OF THE STORE THAT DAY..

SEE, EVER SINCE OUR FIRST NIGHT TOGETHER THERE WAS A THING WE BOTH ACTIVELY REFUSED TO ADDRESS

WELL NOW...

YEAH...

THAT WAS...

SOMETHING

I'LL SAY...

BEFORE OR AFTER SLEEPING TOGETHER, PEOPLE HOPEFULLY AT LEAST HAVE ***SOME*** IDEA WHAT THAT MEANT FOR THEM. BE IT A FLING OR A RELATIONSHIP MILESTONE, OR WHATEVER.

AND EVEN IF THE ARE UNSURE THEY WILL AT LEAST AT SOME POINT HAVE *"THE TALK"*.

AS FOR US, WE WERE DOING OUR VERY BEST TO AVOID *"THE TALK"*.

"THE TALK" WAS BAD

"THE TALK" THREATENED OUR LITTLE SLICE OF HEAVEN.

IT MEANT ACKNOWLEDGING THE FACT THAT THIS FRIENDSHIP OF OURS JUST WENT IN TO THE DARK WITHOUT A FLASHLIGHT.

SO INSTEAD, IN SILENT AGREEMENT WE CHANGED THE TOPIC AND JUST SKIPPED ALL OF IT. FEELING OUR WAY THROUGH THE UNKNOWN PRETENDING WE CAN SEE JUST FINE.

NEXT MOVIE?

OH HELL YES.

AND THIS NOT HAVING THE TALK THING WAS WORKING JUST FINE

UNTIL WE BOTH REALIZED WE PICKED VALENTINE'S DAY FOR OUR FIRST BDSM SESSION.

BUT YOU KNOW WHAT?

SOOO... THURSDAY.

YEAH... I MEAN IF YOU'RE COOL WITH IT.

I'M COOL IF YOU'RE COOL!

OH... UH, YEAH! COOL!

KEEEEWL...

WE WERE COOL WITH IT!

IT'S COOL!
COOL?
YOU KNOW... IT'S NICE!
I'M NOT REALLY LOOKING FOR JUST „NICE" HERE!
I MEAN, IT LOOKS GOOD ON YOU.
UGH... YOU'RE NO HELP

OH FOR CRYING OUT LOUD WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?
I WANT TO KNOW *IF* YOU WERE INTO GIRLS...
BUT I'M NOT!
GROAN!
ANNE WHY ARE YOU FREKING OUT RIGHT NOW? I THOUGHT YOU WENT ON A FEW DATES WITH HER.
CONCERTS! NOT DATES!
THERE'S A *DIFFERENCE?*
UH... WELL... IT'S A MATTER OF CONVERSATION TOPICS... I DON'T KNOW, WHEN SURROUNDED BY METAL WE MOSTLY TALK ABOUT BANDS AND THEN, I DON'T KNOW, MAKE OUT A BIT...
THIS IS AN ACTUAL DATE! WE'RE GOING OUT FOR DINNER, AND LIKE, ADULT STUFF
WOW... YOU DO SOUND LIKE A KID! SHE MIGHT NEED TO DOUBLECHECK YOUR I.D.
YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN, DAMN IT! WE'LL GET TO REALLY KNOW EACH OTHER AND I JUST WANT TO...
PRESENT THE MOST POLISHED SPITSHINED VERSION OF YOU THAT YOU CAN.
WELL... YEAH.
SHE SAID YES TO GRUNGY CLOTHES ANNE AND TO FANCY CLOTHES ANNE.
THE COMMON DENOMINATOR HERE IS YOU. OKAY?
THIS WILL DO!
YOU THINK?
HM...
CASSIE, YOU GOT SOME FREE TIME?
I GOT A FEW HOURS. WHY?

I NEED A FAVOR...

YOU KNOW THEY HAVE PROFESSIONALS THAT DO THIS STUFF.

WHICH AT THE MOMENT I CAN'T AFFORD CAUSE I BURNED THROUGH MY FUN FUNDS TO BUY THE CLOTHES AND GO ON CONCERTS. SO MY OPTIONS WERE TO EITHER GO WITH AN OUTGROWTH...

...OR HAVE MY BEST FRIEND EVER SAVE MY ASS.

I'M OFF TO WORK YOU TWO! THERE'S CHICKEN AND GREEK SALAD IN THE FRIDGE IF YOU'RE HUNGRY. OKAY?

THANKS, DAD! SEE YA!

I'LL BE OFF AS WELL. TOM IS COMING OVER IN AN HOUR.

PLUS, YOU'RE ALL DARK AND EDGY AGAIN SO MY WORK HERE IS DONE.

ALMOST DARK AND EDGY ENOUGH, BUT THIS PART I CAN DO ON MY OWN.

UH... OKAY, I'M JUST GONNA PUT THIS OUT THERE: DYING YOUR EYEBROWS IS WEIRD.

CASSIE, I DON'T NEED THIS SHIT RIGHT NOW.

FINE, FINE! YOU KEEP ON BEING A SELF-LOATHING BLONDE, I'M OUT!

GOOD LUCK ON YOUR DATE!

THANKS.

ALTHOUGH..

ALTHOUGH, WHAT?

YOU GET ALL DOLLED UP LIKE THIS, MAKE SURE YOUR HAIR AND YOUR EYEBROWS ARE NICE AND DARK BECAUSE YOU ARE ONE COOL DARK METALHEAD...

WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

LET'S SAY YOUR DATE GOES REALLY WELL...

GONNA BE REAL FUNNY WHEN SHE NOTICES THE CARPET DOESN'T MATCH THE DRAPES.

HAH!

...

YOU UNBELIEVABLE BITCH!

OKAY, LISTEN...

...

FUCK IT!

SHAVE

SHAVE

SHAVE

IT WAS EITHER THIS OR DYEING EVERYTHING DOWN THERE.

AND YES, I KNOW IT SEEMS LIKE A MASSIVE OVERREACTION

IN HINDSIGHT IT PROBABLY WAS...

BUT, LIKE I SAID... THIS WAS THE BIG NIGHT.

THE BIG DATE...

AND YOU KNOW WHAT? FUCK YEAH I WAS GONNA DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO MAKE IT A PERFECT ONE!

BUT I GUESS I SHOULD EXPLAIN WHY THIS NIGHT WAS SO IMPORTANT...

SEE... COUNTING FROM OUR FIRST KISS, THIS WAS GONNA BE OUR FIFTH DATE. NOW, WHY DID I SKIP TELLING YOU ABOUT DATES TWO, THREE AND FOUR?

WELL, HERE IS MY SECOND DATE WITH HER IN A NUTSHELL:
WE MET, WE FLIRTED SHE TEASED ME ABOUT MY DRINKING AGE...
WE LISTENED TO MIRIAM.
AND THEN AT SOME POINT STARTED MAKING OUT
ATERWARD I WOULD CAME HOME AND BASKED IN THE MEMORIES.
SOUND FAMILIAR?
IT SHOULD. TAKE AWAY THE HEELS AND A FANCY DRESS, AND IT WAS A BEAT BY BEAT REHASH OF OUR FIRST DATE.

IN FACT...HERE IS OUR THIRD DATE...

AND THE FOURTH

I WASN'T KIDDING WHEN I SAID WE WERE TAKING IT SLOW. IN FACT, RUNNING IN PLACE WOULD HAVE BEEN A BETTER DESCRIPTION.

BY THAT POINT I COULD HAVE SWORN I WAS LIVING IN SOME WEIRD GROUNDHOG'S DAY SCENARRIO BUT UNLIKE BILL MURRAY IN THAT MOVIE I KNEW NO MORE ABOUT LAURA THAN I DID THE FIRST TIME I MET HER, AND YOU KNOW WHAT? I WAS ALL KINDS OF DONE WITH THAT!

WHAT THE...

UH... HEY, LAURA, IT'S ME.

ANNE? UH... IT'S THREE A.M.

I KNOW, AND I'M SORRY... IT'S JUST... I HAVE TO ASK!

ASK WHAT?

YOU WANNA GO OUT WITH ME THIS FRIDAY? LIKE ON A REAL DATE?

OH...

YOU THERE?

YE-YEAH... SORRY... UH... SURE, LET'S DO THAT. CALL ME TOMORROW OKAY?

YEAH! WILL DO!

THREE TIMES I MADE MY MOVE ON LAURA

I ASKED HER FOR DRINKS AT OUR FIRST CONCERT

I SEDUCED HER ON OUR SECOND ONE

AND THAT NIGHT AT THREE A.M. I MADE MY THIRD MOVE.

AND AS IT TURNED OUT THIS WAS GOING TO BE THE BIG ONE.

IT WAS A COLD FRIDAY NIGHT IN JANUARY. BUT I WAS OBLIVIOUS TO EVERYTHING

I GUESS IT'S HARD TO THINK OF THE COLD WHEN YOU ARE EQUAL PARTS ECSTATIC AND FEARFUL.

ECSTATIC FOR THE DATE
BUT FEARFUL OF SCREWING IT UP.

I MEAN I WAS THE ONE WHO INITIATED ALL OF THIS.

AS AN ARTIST I WAS WELL FAMILIARIZED WITH THE NAGGING WORM OF SELF DOUBT SO I RECOGNIZED IT'S WHISPERS IN THE BACK OF MY MIND.

WHAT IF I SCREW IT UP?

WHAT IF I BORE HER?

WHAT IF WE GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER AND DON'T LIKE WHAT WE SEE ANYMORE

WHAT IF...

WHAT IF....

WHAT IF...

MARIANNE?

AND ALL OF A SUDDEN JUST LIKE THAT ALL OF THE WHAT IFS WERE GONE

SHE WAS THERE.

HER SMILE AND VOICE TURNING MY HEART INTO A RACING ANIMAL, RESTLESS AND WILD.

AND I THOUGHT, ALL OF MY EFFORT WAS WORTH IT. THIS DATE IS GOING TO BE AMAZING.

I WAS HALF RIGHT.

THAT WAS THE NIGHT I FELL IN LOVE WITH LAURA.

THE NIGHT OF OUR BAD DATE.

IT WAS VALENTINE'S DAY.

THAT WAS WHEN IT ALL BEGUN.

THAT WAS THE DAY I CRAFTED MY FIRST PIECE OF BDSM GEAR.

SCRAT SCRAT

I DIDN'T DO IT OUT OF ANY CREATIVE URGE. WASN'T EVEN A MATTER OF GETTING READY FOR THE NIGHT AHEAD OF US.

TRUTH WAS I NEEDED A DISTRACTION

A NET OF SORTS TO KEEP THE BUTTERFLIES IN MY STOMACH AT BAY.

THE STRESS OF OUR FIRST TRY AT BDSM WAS MORE THAN ENOUGH ON ITS OWN, BUT THAT OTHER THING. THAT WAS WHAT HAD BOTH OF US ON THE EDGE.

THE POSSIBILITY OF THE TALK.

IN HINDSIGHT, MAYBE THAT WAS WHY MY FIRST PIECE OF CRAFTER GEAR WAS A BALLGAG?

CAN'T DO MUCH TALKING WITH ONE OF THOSE.

OKAY I MAY BE OVERTHINKING THIS SHIT A BIT.

IN THE END, I MADE A SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE DECISION. IF SHE DOESN'T BRING IT UP. I WASN'T GONNA EITHER.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

HUH?

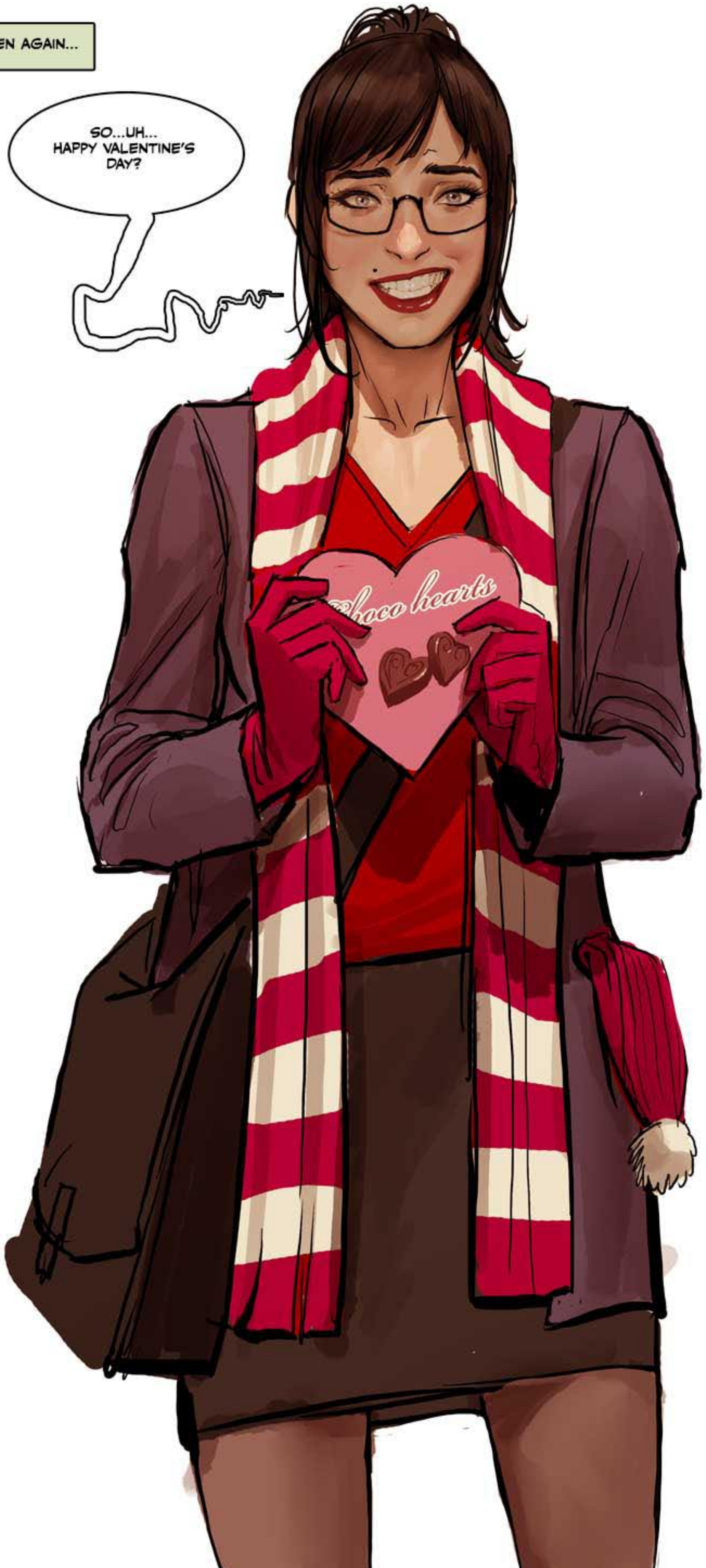
I MEAN, WE COULD JUST TRY TO IGNORE THE MASSIVE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM THAT WAS OUR UNRESOLVED RELATIONSHIP STATUS ON VALENTINE'S DAY AND JUST FOCUS ON OUR KINKIER PLANS.

IT COULD WORK.

CHRIS, MY DUDE THAT'S SOME BAAAD TIMING!

THEN AGAIN...

SO...UH... HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY?



UH?
JUST ME HERE!
GET IN!
WELL AREN'T WE EXCITED!
YOU DIDN'T CALL ME, HOW DID YOU SNEAK IN?
I DIDN'T I JUST ENTERED, SEE I WAS GONNA CALL YOU, BUT THEN I NOTICED A FEW GUYS WALK IN WITH THEIR GIRLFRIENDS AND ASKED HOW COME THEY WERE... YOU KNOW, JUST GOING IN.
ONE OF THEM TOLD ME THE OWNER POSTED A NOTICE THAT TODAY WAS AN EXCEPTION TO THE WHOLE *DUDES ONLY* RULE.
SO YEAH... UH... *S'PRISE?*

AND LIKE I SAID.... HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY

YEAH, THERE WAS NO GOING AROUND IT...

I... UH....

AFTER ALL, I CARED ABOUT HER.

I CARED ABOUT HER TOO MUCH TO NOT BE HONEST ABOUT THIS ONE BIG IMPORTANT THING. EVEN IF IT ENDED UP ALIENATING US, I HAD TO SAY IT. I HAD TO BECAUSE SHE WAS THE ONLY PERSON WITH WHOM I COULD BE HONEST ABOUT MYSELF BACK THEN. BECAUSE SHE WAS MY BEST FRIEND.

Choco hearts

OKAY, LISTEN. I CAN'T DO THIS.

DO... WHAT?

YOU ARE WAY TOO IMPORTANT TO ME TO FUCKING LIE TO YOU. TRUTH IS, ALLY, I...

I DON'T LOVE YOU...

OH THANK GOD!

I.... UH, WAIT WHAT?

I DON'T LOVE YOU EITHER!!!

YOU DON'T?

NO! I MEAN I LOVE YOU BUT LIKE A FRIEND I DON'T, YOU KNOW...

LOVE LOVE YOU! *I KNOW!* LIKE NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRY, I JUST CAN'T IMAGINE SNUGGLING NEXT TO YOU JUST SPOONING AND BEINGALL LOVEY-DOVEY AND SHIT,

RIGHT?

OR HAVING A ROMANTIC CANDLELIGHT DINNER! LIKE, HONESTLY I CAN'T EVEN SAY THAT I FIND YOU PARTICULARRY *SEXUALLY* APPEALING! LET ALONE ANYTHING ELSE!

NOT EVEN A BIT?

COME ON, DUDE, WE'RE BDSM FETISHISTS WATCHING BDSM PORN. IT'S THE OUTFITS, BONDAGE AND GAGGED MOANING THAT GETS MY ENGINE RUNNING, NOT YOU!

AND DON'T GET ME WRONG. I'M SURE SOME GIRL WILL GO WEAK IN THE KNEES AND NIAGARA FALLS BETWEEN HER LEGS ABOUT YOU BUT TO ME YOU ARE LIKE...

UH...

A VIBRATOR WITH MY BEST FRIEND ATTACHED TO IT.

ABSOLUTE DESTRUCTION!

BUUT... FOR ALL IT'S WORTH IT'S A FINE VIBRATOR AND A FINER FRIEND

HEH! I'LL TAKE IT!

ALTHO THE VIBRATOR PART RUNS OUT OF JUICE TOO FAST!

OH FOR FUCK SAKE LET MY EGO RECOVER A BIT!

GET BETTER!

WELL... I GUESS PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

THAT'S THE SPIRIT!

SERIOUSLY THOUGH, WE GONNA BE OKAY?

BETTER THAN OKAY.

SO... THE FUCK DOES THIS MAKE US? LIKE, SEX FRIENDS?

I MEAN, THERE HAS TO BE A BETTER NAME FOR IT.

CAN'T SAY I KNOW ONE.

BUT HEY, NOW THAT WE'RE DONE WITH THE PAINFUL, UNCOMFORTABLE STUFF, HOWZABOUT WE GET TO SOME BDSM?

OKAY! SOOO... WHAT'S THE PLAN? WHICH OF US WILL BE THE DOM AND WHO WILL SUB?

I DUNNO... I KINDA WANTED TO MAYBE TRY DOMMING?

HEH! ME TOO!

YOU WANTED ME TO DOM?

NO I WANTED ME TO DOM.

OH...

WHY?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHY? IT SEEMS FUN, I WANNA TRY IT ... WHY DO YOU WANT TO???

UH... FAIR ENOUGH.

SO NOW WHAT...

OKAY, SO WHOEVER LOSES NOW WILL BE THE DOM NEXT TIME.

DEAL

CALL IT!

HEADS!

FUCK!!!

FINE... YOUR ASS IS MINE NEXT TIME!

FIGURATIVELY SPEAKING?

MAYBE.

COME ON! I'LL START STRIPPING, YOU GET THE ROPES AND CONDOMS READY I GUESS.

YOU GOT IT!

WAIT!

FUCK! HOLD THAT THOUGHT! I'LL BE RIGHT BACK!

FINE! BUT LOCK THE DOORS!

THE STRESS OF THE WHOLE THING MADE ME TOO DISTRACTED TO RESUPPLY. BUT THAT STRESS WAS NOW GONE AND FORGOTTEN.

ALL THAT WAS LEFT WAS EAGER ANTICIPATION

AFTER ALL, SHE WAS THERE. IN MY ROOM. READY.

STUNNING...

AND ALL I HAD TO DO WAS NOT FUCK IT UP.

BE A TERRIBLE DOM...

LIKE... MESS UP THE KNOTS AND MAKE IT ALL UNCOMFORTABLE.

OR COME IN WITH NO IDEA FOR WHAT WE SHOULD DO

UNDERSTANDABLY, BY THE TIME I CAME BACK TO THE ROOM MY EAGER ANTICIPATION WAS SLOWLY BUT SURELY REPLACED WITH A CHILLING, CRAWLING SENSE OF....

GOT 'EM!

PLUS I WAS ABOUT TO PARTAKE IN MY ONE TRUE FETISH.

I WASN'T REALLY SEXUALLY EXPERIENCED, SO FINISHING EARLY WAS AN EVER PRESENT DANGER ON ANY DAY... BUT WITH THIS...

SNAP

PANIC!

WELL, THEN, SHALL WE BEGIN, MASTER?

DON'T PANIC!!!

A DATE IS NOT ALL THAT SCARY! IN FACT, IT'S KIND OF LIKE A JOB INTERVIEW. HI! MY NAME IS MARIANNE MURPHY, AND I'M HERE TO APPLY FOR THE POSITION OF A GIRLFRIEND. I HEAR THERE ARE POSSIBILITIES FOR A PROMOTION DOWN THE LINE

...

WHAT'S THAT? MY CREDENTIALS?

UH....

SOME WEATHER TODAY, HUH?

I'M REAL GOOD AT STATING THE OBVIOUS!

MISS MURPHY, DON'T CALL US, WE'LL CALL YOU.

BUT IN ALL SERIOUSNESS, MY INITIAL AWKWARDNESS ASIDE THE DATE STARTED OFF WELL ENOUGH...

OH GOD... I DID NOT JUST SAY THAT...

PFFF....

NO NO... IT'S ALL GOOD, NOW HERE'S JANICE WITH THE TRAFFIC REPORT!

HEY, I'M NOT ALL THAT USED TO DATING I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU DO BETTER!

MARIANNE, YOU OPENED WITH THE WEATHER... IT'S NOT MUCH OF A CHALLENGE.

WELL, YEAH! WEATHER! AS IN SNOW, AND ICE AND I WAS TRYING TO BREAK THE ICE. IT'S ACTUALLY CLEVER IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT.

AND NOW IT'S GETTING KINDA SAD.

AGAIN, STILL A BETTER ICEBREAKER THAN YOURS.

HEH! PUT UP OR SHUT UP THEN? HUH? FINE. I SEE YOUR WEATHER REPORT AND I'LL RAISE YOU...

...

UH... LAURA? SOMETHING WRONG?

WHAT? OH...

NO...

IT'S FINE... UM... YEAH! YOU'LL LOVE THIS!

WAIT! THAT'S... THAT'S YOU AND MIRIAM!?

HOLY CRAP WHEN WAS THIS?

ABOUT THREE YEARS AGO. IT'S FROM ONE OF THEIR EARLY GIGS!

HAH! THAT'S COOL. SO THAT'S YOU AT MY AGE.

SO, WHO'S THE PIXIE?

JUST.. A FORMER ACQUAINTANCE.

THAT'S AN ODD WAY OF INTRODUCING SOMEONE.

STILL TRUE. I USED TO HANG OUT WITH HER AND I NO LONGER DO THAT. ANYWAYS... LET'S ORDER.

I'LL HAVE...

THE UNDERAGED YOUNG LADY HERE WILL HAVE A DIET COKE AND AN APPLE MARTINI FOR ME.

HEY, LAURA... HERE'S A THING TO STIR YOUR MARTINI.

NOW NOW, DON'T FROWN, YOU BUY ME FOUR MORE OF THOSE AND YOUR CHANCES OF SEEING A NAKED LADY TONIGHT WILL GROW EXPONENTIALLY.

OH PLEASE! I SEE A NAKED LADY EVERY TUESDAY AND THURSDAY FOR FREE... ISH.

?

ART CLASSES. MY BEST FRIEND IS ACTUALLY ONE OF OUR MODELS.

SO I SEE PLENTY OF HER NAKED BUTT.

OH? YOU'RE SOME KIND OF AN ARTIST?

WELL... HOPING TO BE ONE.

IT'S A ROUGH MOUNTAIN TO CLIMB

BEING A SUCCESSUFL ARTIST, I MEAN.

WELL AREN'T YOU A SUPPORTIVE ONE?

NO, SORRY, WHAT I MEAN IS, I RUN A TATTOO SHOP AND I HEAR STORIES.

TATTOO SHOP?

YEAH? EVER THOUGHT OF TRYING IT? TATTOOING I MEAN.

THOUGHT OF IT?

PLEASE!

I ACTUALLY DID IT! ONCE.

YOU'RE SHITTING ME!?

NO, FOR REAL. SENIOR YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL A FRIEND FROM BACK THEN TOLD ME HIS BROTHER SET UP A TATTOO STUDIO AND WAS AWAY FOR A WEEK. ANYHOW, MY FRIEND WANTED TO GET HIS BAND LOGO TATTOOED ON HIS BACK.

IT WAS NOTHING FANCY MIND YOU. JUST A SIMPLE LINEWORK OF AN ALL SEEING EYE.

NOW, MY FRIEND KEPT TRYING TO GET HIS ***BROTHER*** TO DO IT FOR HIM, BUT HE KEPT REFUSING. MEANWHILE, I REALLY WANTED TO TRY TATTOOING SO, NATURALLY I SAID YES.

I WENT THERE WITH CASSIE AND... ***I ACTUALLY DID IT.***

AND BELIEVE YOU ME, I STILL REMEMBER EVERY SECOND OF IT!

WHAT IF I MADE IT FOR YOU?

NAH I'M GOOD... I'M NOT A TATTOO KIND OF PERSON...

I HAVE ENOUGH TEMPORARY REGRETS IN LIFE. I DON'T NEED A PERMANENT ONE!

THE WHOLE TIME I WAS MAKING DUMB JOKES, TEASING CASSIE, DOING ANYTHING TO DISTRACT MYSELF FROM DEALING WITH THE INTERNAL FREAKOUT I WAS HAVING AT THE MOMENT.

I MEAN, ANY WAY YOU PUT IT, THIS WAS WEIRD.

LIKE, I'M DRAWING ON THIS DUDE... WITH A ***NEEDLE!***

I CONSTANTLY HAD THIS VISION OF MYSELF PRESSING DOWN TOO HARD AND TEARING HIS SKIN APART

IN MY MIND I SAW ***EMERGENCY ROOMS!***

BLOOD EVERYWHERE!

I HAD ACTUAL NIGHTMARES ABOUT IT LATER!

HAHHAHA

OH, GOD... YOU REALLY ARE SOMETHING, MARIANNE!

HEH... I NEVER TOLD THIS TO ANYONE BEFORE.

NOT EVEN CASSIE.

SO WHAT ABOUT YOU? HOW DID YOU GET TO RUN A TATTOO SHOP?

IT'S A...

...

...LONG UNPLEASANT STORY. A LOT OF THEM ARE IN MY LIFE.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

UH... WHAT ABOUT ME?

TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOU?

I DUNNO. I KINDA DREAM OF BEING AN ILLUSTRATOR. BEEN INTERESTED IN ART AND METAL SINCE MY TEENS.

WHEN I'M NOT DOING THAT I USUALLY JUST HANG OUT WITH CASSIE... MY BEST FRIEND.

SO... CASSIE IS THE NAKED ONE?

YEAH...

HOW DID YOU MEET HER?

I DON'T KNOW, MAYBE IT WAS BECAUSE I ACTUALLY ***WANTED*** TO KNOW MORE ABOUT HER TATTOO BUSINESS...

BUT I THOUGHT... REALLY? ME AGAIN?

THEN AGAIN SHE DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT CASSIE EXCEPT THAT SHE IS MY BEST FRIEND WHO AT TIMES I SEE NAKED. I FIGURED I'D WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT SUCH A PERSON IF I WAS HER.

SO I TOLD HER THE STORY BUT EVERY NOW AND THEN I TRIED GETTING HER TO TELL ME MORE ABOUT HERSELF,

I MEAN, SURELY SHE'D BE EAGER TO SHARE AS WELL.... RIGHT?

LIKE, SHARE ABOUT HER JOB...

I JUST MANAGE THE SHOP... OTHERS DO THE INTERESTING STUFF.

SO YOU SAID YOU ONLY HAD TWO SHORT FLINGS IN THE PAST?

HER OTHER INTERESTS...

JUST TATTOOS AND METAL.

BY THE WAY I LOVE YOUR SHIRT... THING. WHERE DID YOU GET IT?

HER FRIENDS...

I GOT A FEW OF THEM... HOW ABOUT YOU? ANYONE BESIDES CASSIE?

IN THE END, AN HOUR HAD PASSED AND I KNEW NO MORE OF HER THAN I DID COMING IN.

AND I WAS, UH... WELL, I WAS SUPPRESSING SOME FEELINGS ABOUT THAT.

AT HOUR TWENTY MARK, THE DINNER WAS OVER, AND NOTHING CHANGED.

AND THAT'S PRETTY MUCH ALL THERE IS TO SAY ABOUT ME...

UH... SO YOU WANNA CHIP IN?

I DID!

NOT THE MONEY! I TOLD YOU A LOT ABOUT MYSELF SO, I DON'T KNOW... I FIGURED YOU WANTED TO... YOU KNOW SHARE SOME ABOUT YOU.

INK AND METAL. BABY. THAT'S ALL I'M ABOUT.

I GRASPED AT MY LAST BIT OF HOPE THINKING: OKAY, MAYBE SHE IS JUST *CATASTROPHICALLY* BAD AT NUANCE AND HINTS AND I HAD TO BE VERY BLATANT ABOUT THIS!

I KNOW BUT... I MEAN... I WANNA GET TO KNOW YOU. LIKE, AS A PERSON, I DON'T KNOW, THAT WAS SORT OF THE POINT OF.... WELL *ALL OF THIS.*

LIKE I SAID.... ALL I'M ABOUT IS INK AND METAL.

LAURA, AM I DOING SOMETHING WRONG HERE CAUSE.... I DON'T KNOW THIS FEELS ONE SIDED AS HELL RIGHT NOW.

HUH? NO, YOU'RE FINE THIS IS FINE

REALLY? CAUSE I JUST SPENT OVER AN HOUR TALKING ABOUT MYSELF AND YOU AVOIDED SAYING PRETTY MUCH ANYTHING ABOUT YOU AND AT THE MOMENT I'M THINKING EITHER YOU ARE A GOVERNMENT SPY OR MAYBE THIS WAS ALL A BIG MISTAKE

I....

FAIR ENOUGH.

MARIANNE!

GOODBYE, LAURA.

MARIANNE!

FUCK..

FUCK..

FUCK!!!

MARIANNE WAIT!

NO, LAURA! YOU SAID WHAT YOU WANTED TO SAY, AND APPARENTLY THAT WAS NOTHING!

SO JUST...

LEAVE ME ALONE!

JUST GIVE ME THIS ONE MOMENT, PLEASE!

IF YOU EVER FELT THERE COULD BE SOMETHING MORE BETWEEN US GIVE ME THIS ONE CHANCE!

I'LL TELL YOU, OKAY?

THING IS...

YOU.. SCARE ME!

WHAT?

EVER SINCE THE FIRST NIGHT WE MET YOU'VE BEEN ON MY MIND.

A BEAUTY THAT CAME OUT OF NOWHERE !

MARIANNE OF MY DARK HEART. A DESTINED FUCKING COINCIDENCE...

A... WONDERFUL DREAM

AND I GUESS THAT WAS WHAT ALL OF THOSE CONCERTS WERE, RELIVING THAT DREAM

BUT THEN YOU ASKED ME OUT ON A DATE AND SUDDENLY ALL OF IT BECAME REAL... AND... I PANICKED! OKAY?

I UH...

I DON'T HAVE A GOOD TRACK RECORD WITH RELATIONSHIPS. IN FACT I HAD TWO OF THEM CRASH AND BURN ALREADY.

MY FIRST GIRLFRIEND WAS WITH ME FOR THREE YEARS THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL AND IN THE END DUMPED ME FOR AN OLDER GIRL.

MY SECOND GIRLFRIEND, WAS THE GIRL FROM THE PHOTO. WE SPENT TWO YEARS TOGETHER UNTIL I FOUND OUT I WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A FUCKING PROLONGED BISEXUAL PHASE FOR HER, AND SHE CHEATED ON ME WITH SOME BASS PLAYER FOR A SHITTY PUNK BAND.

AND HONESTLY, I WAS OVER IT! I WAS OVER IT ENOUGH FOR ME TO TAKE THAT FUCKING PHOTO THAT SHE IS ON AND SHOW IT TO YOU!

BUT THEN I PULLED THE DAMNED THING OUT AND I FUCKING FROZE AGAIN!

SO YOU'RE NOT OVER HER?

WHAT?

NO!

I MEAN, YES I'M OVER HER BUT IT'S NOT HER IT'S YOU!

SEE, I KNOW I'M A LITTLE WALLED OFF, BUT.... NOT BECAUSE I DON'T LIKE YOU... IT'S...

WHAT?

YOU GOT HEARTBREAK WRITTEN ALL OVER YOU!

SCUSE ME?

ARGH... LISTEN, ON ANY GIVEN DAY CHANCES OF FINDING ANOTHER LESBIAN IN THE WILD ARE SHIT AS IT IS, BUT FINDING SOMEONE LIKE YOU...

SOMEONE LIKE ME?

SOMEONE PERFECT!!!!

UH... OKAY, BUT...YOU CALLED ME A LESBIAN, CARDS ON THE TABLE

I'M BISEXUAL.

I CAN FIX THAT!

IT'S NOT BROKEN.

MMMGH!!!

MARIANNE, WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY IS, YOU ARE EVERYTHING I COULD HAVE WISHED FOR AND IT SCARES ME!

THAT'S WHY I WAS SO EVASIVE. OKAY? BECAUSE IF YOU KNEW ABOUT ALL OF MY PREVIOUS EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE I FEARED YOU WOULD BAIL!

SO YEAH. THERE! I'M A ***MESS.***

I'VE FALLEN FOR YOU, AND HERE I AM RUINING IT BECAUSE I'M ALREADY AFRAID OF LOSING YOU AND...

UMF?

LAURA...

SHUT THE FUCK UP AND KISS ME!

IT WAS A BAD DATE. A FRUSTRATING EXPERIENCE. I WANTED TO KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT HER, YET IN THE END I LEARNED SO LITTLE...

BUT THE LITTLE BIT I LEARNED WAS SO IMPORTANT...

I LEARNED THAT SHE WAS A BIT OF AN EMOTIONAL MESS...

SHE WAS AFRAID OF BEING HURT AGAIN...

SHE HAD AN UNREALISTICALLY IDEALIZED OPINION OF ME...

AND I LEARNED WHAT A KISS FELT LIKE WHEN YOU'VE JUST FALLEN IN LOVE.

THERE WAS NO MUSIC THIS TIME

NO CHEERING CROWD. BUT I SWEAR AS SHE KISSED ME I COULD HEAR IT ALL SOMEWHERE IN THE DISTANCE... OR MAYBE CLOSE... BUT QUIET.... BETWEEN THE HEARTBEATS.

A FAMILIAR SONG... OUR SONG. A LYRIC ECHOING IN THE DISTANCE "I REMEMBER THE TIME..."

IT WAS ABSOLUTELY WONDERFUL.

COME TO MY PLACE TONIGHT!
OWH--- OKAY...
UH, WAIT! UH.. I KINDA GOTTA CALL MY DAD FIRST.
KHM...
SHUT IT!
BREEP BREEP
BREEP BREEP
HEY, MARIANNE. EVERYTHING OKAY?
YEAH DAD, JUST CALLING TO TELL YOU NOT TO...UH... EXPECT ME HOME TONIGHT.
YOU ARE GOING TO SPEND THE NIGHT AT UH... LAURA'S, WAS IT?
UH...YEAH...
I SEE... I PRESUME FOR, UH... *THOSE* REASONS.

AHEM... YEAH... MOST LIKELY.

SIGH... FINE. JUST... UH... USE PROTECTION!

YEAH, OKAY, THIS WILL TAKE SOME TIME TO GET USED TO.

YOU'RE TELLING ME...

SHE CALLED ME MASTER!
RIGHT!
THIS IS FINE.
YUP!
COME ON! DOMINANT THOUGHTS! DOMINANT WORDS!
FUCK, SHE'S HOT!
NO! DAMN IT! TAKE CONTROL OF THIS SITUATION! *DOMINATE!!!*
SO... MY FIRST EVER SESSION AS A DOM WAS OFF TO A PROMISING START...
EEEP!
ALAN?
DUDE? YOU OKAY?
Y-YEAH! NO, JUST UH... JUST FINE!

UH... GIMME A SECOND

OKAY?

JUST... TO GET READY AND ALL.

YEAH,,, TO GET READY

I'VE MADE MY OPINION ON MEN'S CHOICES IN FETISHWEAR CLEAR BEFORE, IT SUCKS ASS. SURE, I FOUND THIS ANNOYING...

BUT NEVER BEFORE THAT DAY DID THIS MAKE ME FEEL SO ABSOLUTELY... WELL, *INADEQUATE.*

I MEAN, TO A FETISHIST, LINGERIE IS A SORT OF A UNIFORM. SOMETIMES LITERALY SO.

AN ELABORATE COSTUME IN A LIVE ACTION ROLE PLAY...

AND BELIEVE YOU ME WHEN YOU ARE ROLEPLAYING, A COOL COSTUME WILL DO WONDERS FOR YOUR IMMERSION.

PROBLEM WAS, IN THIS LARP OF OURS, ALLY CAME DRESSED IN A FULL ON LEATHER AND CHAINMAIL SETUP....

A BEAUTIFULLY FRAMED PICTURE PERFECT OF A KINKSTER READY TO PLAY. SHE WAS... WELL, INTIMIDATINGLY GORGEOUS, .

ME? I HAD A TANK TOP AND A BONER

AND I WAS SUPPOSED TO RUN THIS GAME.

STILL, I THOUGHT... IT WILL BE FINE!

I MEAN, CONFIDENCE IS OPTIONAL FOR A DOM. RIGHT?

YOU OKAY?

UH? YEAH?

OK.

THIS OKAY? I'M NOT STRAINING YOUR ARMS TOO HARD?

NAH. JUST FINE.

LET ME KNOW IF I'M CUTTING OFF YOUR CIRCULATION ANYWHERE

WILL DO

ALMOST DONE!

YOU SURE YOU'RE OKAY?

SIGH...

ALAN, LISTEN. HERE IS SOME ADVICE FROM A TIED UP PERSON...

RELAX!

I'M SORRY...

ALSO, STOP APOLOGIZING. LIKE... RIGHT NOW.

DUDE, IT'S ME... OKAY?

I'M NOT HERE TO JUDGE YOU. I MEAN, I'D PROBABLY BE BUMBLING MY WAY THROUGH THIS IF THE COIN HAD FLIPPED OTHERWISE.

AT LEAST YOU'D LOOK THE PART WHILE BUMBLING THROUGH IT... I GOT A TANK TOP

HEY NOW! ACCORDING TO MAGAZINES IT'S THE OFFICIAL MALE DOM UNIFORM...

HEH

THING IS... I DON'T KNOW, I GUESS I JUST DON'T WANT TO DISAPPOINT YOU...

OKAY, HERE'S HOW I SEE ALL OF THIS... YOU AND I... WE'RE NOT INTO EACH OTHER ROMANTICALLY SPEAKING, BUT WE ARE INTO THIS BDSM STUFF! RIGHT?

YEAH?

SO BASICALLY WE ARE PRACTICING FOR WHEN WE DO FIND THAT SPECIAL SOMEONE SOMEDAY!

I'M.... VERY MUCH OKAY WITH THIS
OKAY!
SO WE'LL TRAIN EACH OTHER, WE'LL ADVISE EACH OTHER. AND WE'LL MASTER THIS DOM SHIT!
OR SUB SHIT!
UH... YEAH THAT TOO!
SOUNDS LIKE A DEAL TO ME!
SHAKE ON IT?
OH FOR FUCK SAKE!
OKAY, YOU SEEM MORE RELAXED. SO, HOW 'BOUT WE GO AND DO SOME FUN STUFF
YEAH!
FUCK!
RIGHT...
WHAT'S WITH ME???
I HAVE NO IDEAS!!!
ARGH! STALL!
SO I DON'T THINK WE SHOULD BE USING THIS QUITE YET.
YOU KNOW... FEEDBACK AND ALL
HM... YEAH FAIR ENOUGH
ALSO, FUCK! WE GONNA NEED A SAFEWORD!
WELL, YOU'RE THE DOM HERE. PICK ONE.

TO MY GREAT SURPRISE, THIS WAS EASY. I KNEW JUST THE SAFEWORD I WANTED. IT WAS THE RIGHT ONE FOR ME EVEN THOUGH IT WASN'T A TERRIBLY ORIGINAL ONE.

I LIKED IT BECAUSE IT WAS JUST UNCOMMON ENOUGH NOT TO BE MISTAKEN FOR SOMETHING ANYONE SAYS ON A DAY TO DAY BASIS. IT HAD THAT PLEADING VIBE TO IT THAT WOULD STOP THE GAME WITHOUT REALLY BREAKING THE MOOD..

MERCY! MY SAFEWORD IS GONNA BE MERCY!

WHAT?

IS IT LIKE... A TEMPORARY SAFEWORD TILL YOU FIGURE OUT A BETTER ONE?

HEY IT'S A GOOD SAFEWORD!

I MEAN... YEAH... IT'S A LITTLE CLICHE THO, DON'T YOU THINK?
I'VE SEEN IT USED IN LIKE FOUR PORN MOVIES AT LEAST.

ALLY...

YOU WILL SAY MERCY OR I WILL SHOW YOU NONE.

WOW!

TOO MUCH?

NONONO! KEEP AT IT, COME ON! THAT WAS IT, I SAW IT IN YOUR EYES, YOU WERE A DOM JUST THEN COME ON, DON'T STOP! LEASH ME!

NOW!!!

BLESS HER LITTLE HEART, FOR A PERSON I STILL CLAIM HAS NO SUBSPACE, SHE WAS GENUINELY TRYING...

WELL, GEE, I'M ALL TIED UP AND HELPLESS NOW. WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO TO ME... MASTER?

I...

...

DON'T KNOW...

MEANWHILE THERE I WAS. FACING THE POINT OF NO RETURN AND CHOKING!

AND THAT'S WHEN IT FINALY DAWNED ON ME...

THE DOMINANT MINDSTATE, THE DOMSPACE WHATEVER YOU NAMED IT...I DIDN'T HAVE IT

THIS WAS WHY I WAS OBSESSING ABOUT FETISHWEAR AND TAKING MY SWEET TIME WITH THE KNOTS AND EVERYTHING ELSE... I WAS SWEATING THE SMALL STUFF HOPING THE BIG PROBLEM WOULD SOLVE ITSELF

LIKE... MY DOMINANCE WOULD JUST RANDOMLY ACTIVATE IF I JUST STARED AT HER TIED UP FOR LONG ENOUGH

BUT THERE I WAS AT THE END OF MY ROPE AND THERE WAS NOTHING BUT COLD FEET AND PANIC. IF THERE WAS A DOMSPACE IN ME, I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO FIND IT... NO COMPASS NO MAP...

BUT AS IT TURNS OUT I DID HAVE *SOMETHING...*

SOMETHING BETTER.

HEH!

I HAD A *GUIDE.*

YOU THINK YOU HAVE ME UNDER YOUR CONTROL?

HUH?

YOU ARE A *JOKE!* YOUR HIGHNESS

WH...

I WILL BE OUT OF THESE BINDS SOON ENOUGH AND YOU WILL KNEEL BEFORE ME LIKE A *WEAKLING* THAT YOU ARE!

BUT IF YOU UNTIE ME YOURSELF I MIGHT JUST SHOW YOU SOME LENIENCE!

I AM WAITING!

IN THE END... IT WAS SO SIMPLE.

OH, DUTCHESS... I SEE YOU NEED SOME REMINDING OF WHO BEARS THE CROWN HERE!

TO MOVE FORWARD WE HAD TO LOOK BACK.
BACK TO THE THING THAT STARTED IT ALL. OUR MOVIE.
"THE LADY IN THE IRON MASK".

AND I DO MEAN ***WE.*** AS UNCONVINCING AS I WAS AS A DOM ALLY WAS DOING NO BETTER AS A SUB. SHE WOULD NEVER ADMIT IT BUT I HAD A FEELING EVEN BACK THEN THAT HER HEART WAS SET ON BEING A DOMME

FOR HER, PLAYING UPON A WELL TREAD PORN TROPE OF A DOMINATRIX CONQUERED WAS THE CLOSEST WAY TO EVEN APPROACH A SUBSPACE

AS FOR ME... WELL, SHE SHOWED ME THE WAY INTO MY DOMSPACE BY AWAKENING THE AWARENESS OF WHAT I LIKED IN A SUB.

DEFIANCE.

IN THE DEEPEST SHRINE THAT WAS OUR DOMSPACE WE BOTH BELIEVED IN THE SAME RULE. A PUNISMENT IS MOST SATISFYING WHEN DESERVED.

AND NOBODY DESERVED THEIR PUNISHMENT MORE THAN A DISOBEDIENT BRATTY SUB.

I'LL ENJOY WATCHING THAT INSOLENCE MELT FROM YOUR FACE ONE ORGASM AT A TIME!

ALSO, BECAUSE OF THIS, ALLY WOULD LATER ON REFER TO US AS LAWFUL GOOD DOMS. HEH!

BUT YEAH. THAT'S HOW OUR FIRST GAME STARTED WE BOTH FOUND OUR MOTIVATION THROUGH PORN. THEN AGAIN THAT'S THE THING WITH BDSM PORN. IT HAS WAYS OF GIVING YOU IDEAS...

YOU WOULDN'T DARE!

OH SURE, ON ANY GIVEN DAY ANYONE CAN TELL YOU THAT BASING YOUR OWN SEXUAL EXPERIENCES ON PORN IS A TERRIBLE IDEA AND THEY'D PROBABLY BE RIGHT

A KING DARES ALL!

OH DEAR!

BDSM PORN. HOWEVER IS BOTH AN ENCYCLOPAEDIA AND A PROOF OF CONCEPT FOR WILD, KINKY IDEAS. ALLY AND I WOULD END UP USING A LOT OF IT AS INSPIRATION. AS... ADVENTURE MODULES FOR OUR KINKY ROLEPLAYING GAME.

A BASIC SCRIPT THAT POINTED US IN A GENERAL DIRECTION, AND WHERE WE WENT FROM THERE WAS ON US.

BUT FIRST I'LL HAVE TO PUNISH THAT DEFIANCE OF YOURS

AND YES, IF YOU WERE WONDERING, IT DID OFTEN COME OFF SOUNDING CRINGY AS SHIT.

ANYWAYS, WHERE WAS I? AH... RIGHT...

SO, ALLY THE DEVIOUS DUTCHESS HAD PISSED OFF THE DUNGEON MASTER AND LOST THE INITIATIVE ROLL...

OKAY, LISTEN, I HAD SOME BAD TIMES IN MY LIFE AND FRIENDS HELPED ME BY GETTING ME INTO ROLEPLAYING. JUST... TRUST ME! THE METAPHOR WORKS!

OH... HEY NOW!

OH YES! MUCH TOO LATE!

MNNH!

I SUPPOSE IT'S TOO LATE FOR AN APOLOGY?

MAKE NO MISTAKE! EVEN THEN, I DESPERATELY WANTED TO ASK: DOES IT HURT? IS IT OKAY?

I DON'T KNOW. I GUESS I FOUND IT HARD TO GET USED TO THE IDEA OF A SAFEWORD BACK THEN. SO EVEN WITH ONE FOOT IN MY DOMSPACE, I PROCEDED VERY HESITANTLY AT FIRST.

BUT EVERY TIME I WOULD HESITATE SHE WOULD GIVE ME A SMALL REASURRING SMILE.

SUCH BOLDNESS!

TRUTH WAS, SHE WAS CHEERING ME ON...

YOUR MAJESTY! I FOUND THE ROYAL SCEPTER!

IN HER OWN WAY...

AND IT MEANT THE WORLD TO ME.. SO I LET GO OF A BIT MORE OF MY ANXIETY AND EMBRACED MY ROLE A BIT TIGHTER

I WAS A DOM!

THE MASTER OF THE GAME...

I WAS A DOM!

AND I HAD AN IDEA!

OKAY, FINE! TECHNICALLY, THE IDEA WAS BORROWED FROM ANOTHER PORN. "MELISSA 'S SLIPPERY RESTRAINTS" BUT I ADDED MY OWN TWIST TO IT...

Booty Oil

OH, HEY, NOW!

SEE... IN MELISSA'S SLIPPERY RESTRAINTS OUR TITULAR PROTAGONIST IS BOUND, OILED AND THEN IMMEDIATELY FUCKED.

MY TWIST...

I WAS JUST GONNA KEEP THE OILING PART GOING

MMM.... MASTER, I AM ALREADY WELL OILED

AND GOING...

AND GOING...

MMMH...

AND GOING...

AAAND GOING...

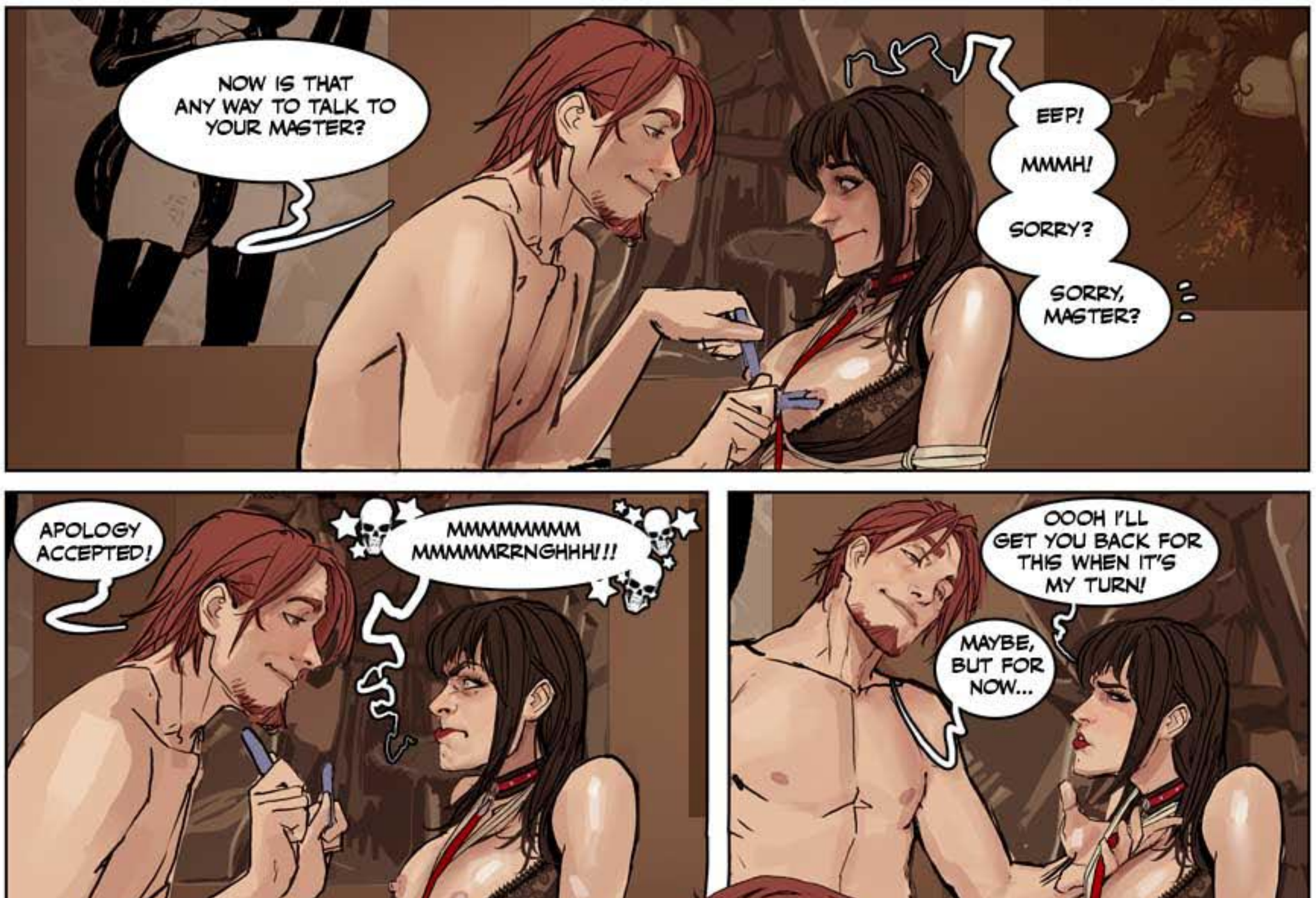
SEE, EVEN THEN I CAUGHT ON TO THE FACT THAT ALLY WASN'T REALL ALL THAT SUBMISSIVE...

BUT SHE WAS...

MASTER... PLEASE...

RESPONSIVE!

OH MY GOD JUST PUT IT IN AND FUCK ME ALREADY!


NOW IS THAT ANY WAY TO TALK TO YOUR MASTER?
EEP!
MMMH!
SORRY?
SORRY, MASTER?
APOLOGY ACCEPTED!
MMMMMMMMM MMMMMRRNGHHH!!!
OOOH I'LL GET YOU BACK FOR THIS WHEN IT'S MY TURN!
MAYBE, BUT FOR NOW...
SHUT IT, SLAVEGIRL!
WAH Y-YES, MASTER!

AND SO WE GET TO IT. SHE GIVES ME ONE LAST ENCOURAGING SMILE AND OR MINDS DRIFT OFF TO UNREACHABLE PLACES

SHE IS SLIPPERY FROM THE OIL SO I GRAB HER FIRMLY

SHE CLENCHES IN HER OWN WAY

VERY QUICKLY I FIND THE SENSATIONS TOO INTENSE REALIZE I HAVE TO REIN THE EXPERIENCE IN

SO MY THOUGHTS TURN TO OLD FAITHFULS BORING STUFF... BASEBALL TENNIS, AND THE 99 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL...

BUT SHE RIPS ME RIGHT OUT OF MY DISTRACTION BY SAYING THE ONE THING THAT WOULD DESTROY ME

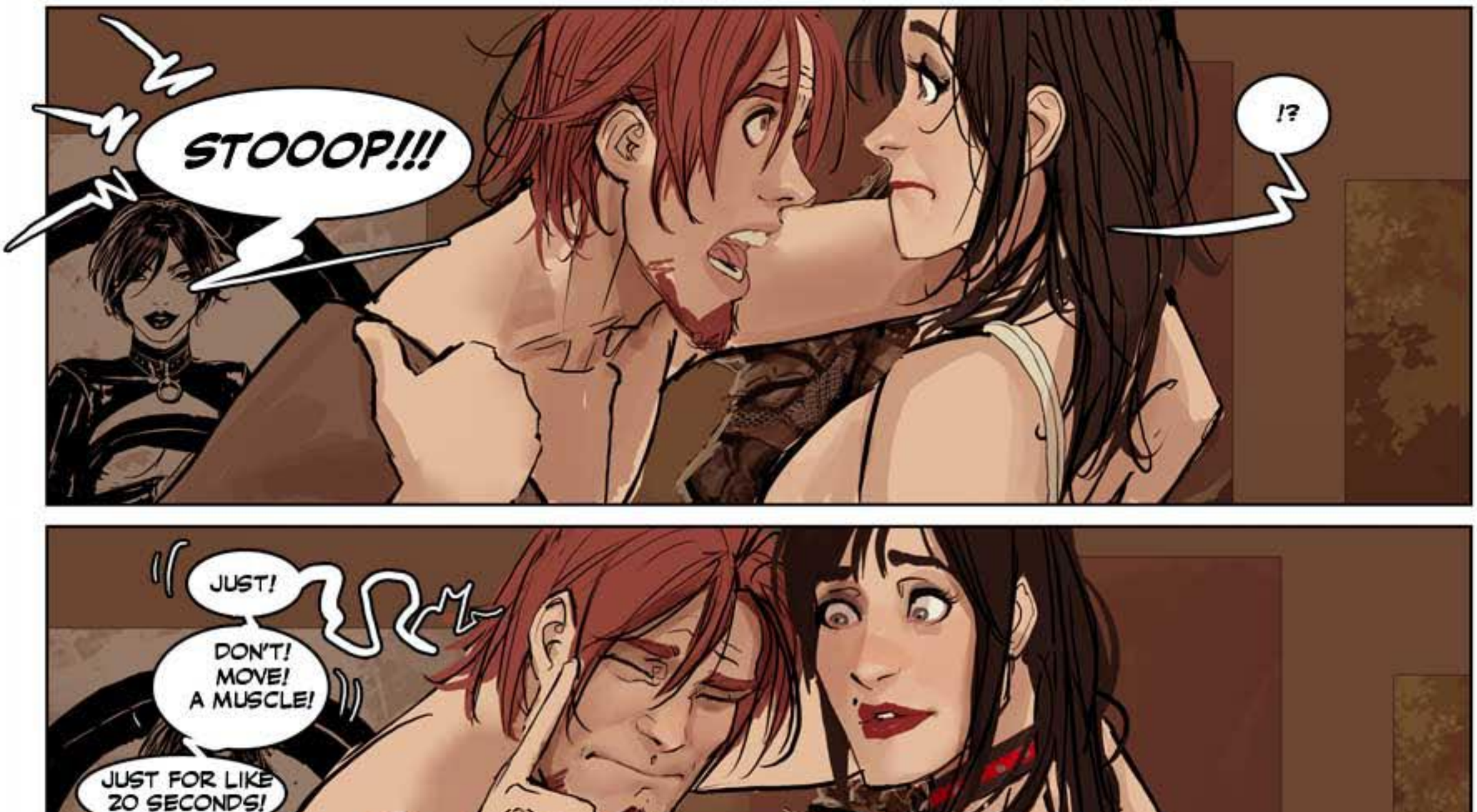
MASTER... HUFF... MMM... DEEPER... ROUGHER

AND INSTREAD OF DISTRACTING MYSELF WITH BORING NONSEXUAL THINGS MY MIND DOES A BACKFLIP INTO OUR FIRST NIGHT, WHEN I HELD HER CLOSELY... MY FINGERS INSIDE OF HER

AND HER WORDS

ROUGHER... DIG DEEPER...

AND...


STOOOP!!!
!?
JUST!
DON'T! MOVE! A MUSCLE!
JUST FOR LIKE 20 SECONDS!

HUMPA
OH, MASTER! BUT YOU ARE PUNISHING ME SO WELL!
HUMPA

HOW WILL THIS DUTCHESS LEARN HER LESSON IF YOU STOP NOW?
GWA-AH-A-A---
HUMP HUMP HUMP HUMP HUMP

AND THE TYRANT HAS FALLEN!!!
VICTORY!!!
AND THAT'S HOW I FOUND MY DOMSPACE. BY EXPLORING BDSM WITH MY BEST FRIEND, AND REENACTING SUCH FINE PORN MOVIES, AS: LADY IN THE IRON MASK, MELISSA'S SLIPPERY RESTRAINTS, AND THE KNOTTY LIST 2...
SANTA CAME EARLY!
YEAH...

IT WAS LIKE AN ENDING TO A FAIRY TALE...

BUT, YOU KNOW... LIKE AN X RATED DIRECTOR'S CUT...

...OR ONE OF THOSE ADULT THEMED FANTASY SHOWS... WITH NUDITY AND STUFF.

ANYHOW, I GOT THE PRINCESS, CRACKED HER ICY SHELL AND THEN WE KISSED FOR AN ETERNITY AND A DAY AS SHE TOOK ME FOR A TOUR OF HER PALACE.

AND WHAT A PALACE IT WAS...

THERE WAS A LIVING ROOM...

A KITCHEN...

OH... A BATHROOM! DEFINITELY HAD ONE OF THOSE!

OKAY, FINE. FOR ALL I KNEW OR CARED WE COULD HAVE BEEN IN AN ABANDONED WAREHOUSE

NONE OF IT MATTERED. I WAS WITH HER.

MMMH... NICE PLACE!

MMM.. THANK YOU!

OH.. KAY?

YOU SURE SEEM EAGER?

WHA? UH... TOO FAST?

NO, BUT RELAX. YOU HAVE ME FOR THE WHOLE NIGHT!

HEH... YEAH... I ACTUALLY DO, DON'T I?

OKAY... UH... SO, HOW ABOUT SOME DRINKS THEN?

I PROMISE I WON'T TELL ANYONE

IT WAS SO ENDEARING. OUTSIDE THE SAFETY OF A METAL CONCERT, WITH NO AGE JOKES TO COVER HER INSECURITY SHE WAS A BIT OF AN AWKWARD MESS.

YOU KNOW WHAT? I',M GOOD. I DON'T THINK I NEED ANY MORE LUBRICANT, SOCIAL OR OTHERWISE!

THERE WAS AN HONEST EAGERNESS TO HER THAT MADE ME WANT HER EVEN MORE...

IN FACT, I THOUGHT THEN AND THERE: SHE COULD NOT BE ANY SEXIER THAT SHE IS RIGHT NOW!

I WAS WRONG!

I THINK I MAY GET ONE...

!

?

UH... MARIA...

SSSSHH... NO TALKING! ADMIRING ART!

THIS IS... GORGEOUS!

EHUEH... UH... I MEAN THANKS?

AND THAT WAS HOW I DISCOVERED THAT INK WAS MY FIRST KINK.

AND THAT IS HOW LAURA DISCOVERED THAT MY INK KINK WAS HER KINK.

COME HERE!

WAH!

DID IT HURT?

I GUESS. I MEAN, PARTS OF IT DID. SPINE AND SUCH...

OH... WELL THAT'S JUST TERRIBLE.

PRETTY BUTTERFLY HAS A MEAN BITE, HUH?

HEH!

OKAY, DONE ADMIRING THE ART?

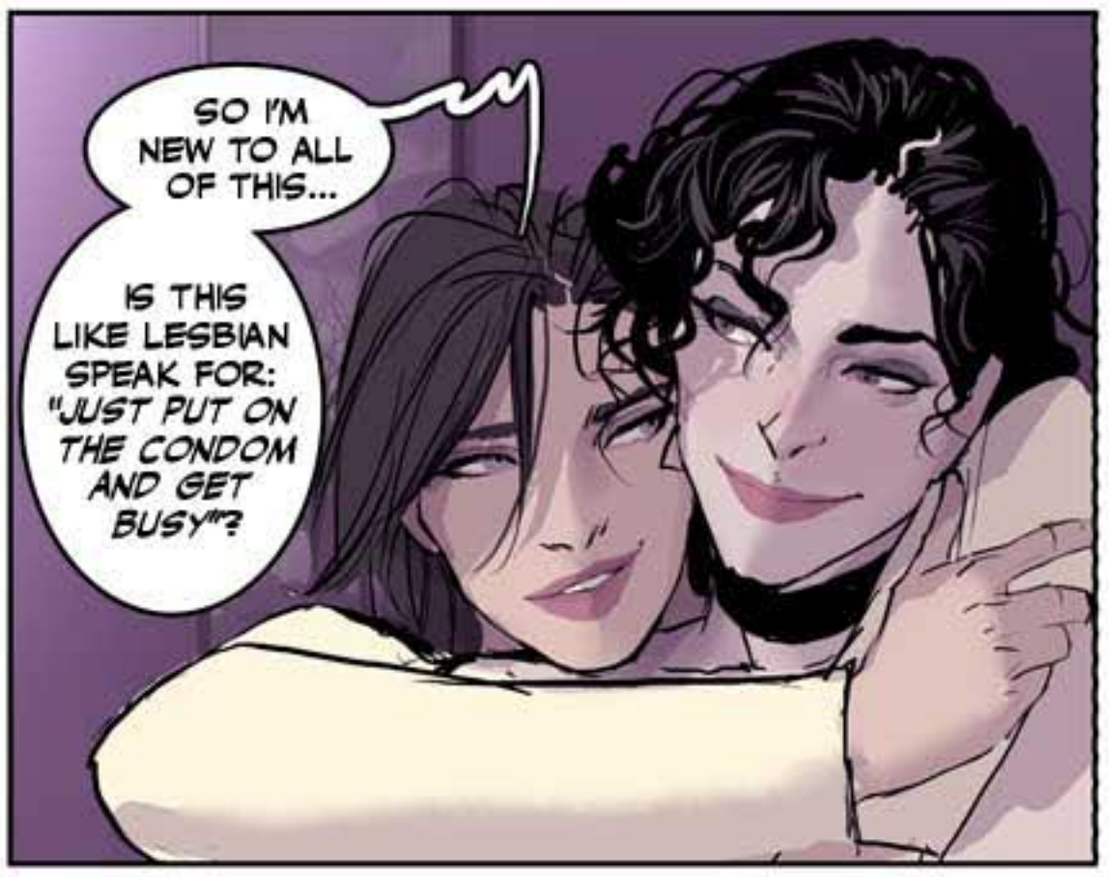
NOPE! THE MEAN BUTTERFLY HURT YOU AND NOW I HAVE TO LICK IT BETTER!

EHWEH!?

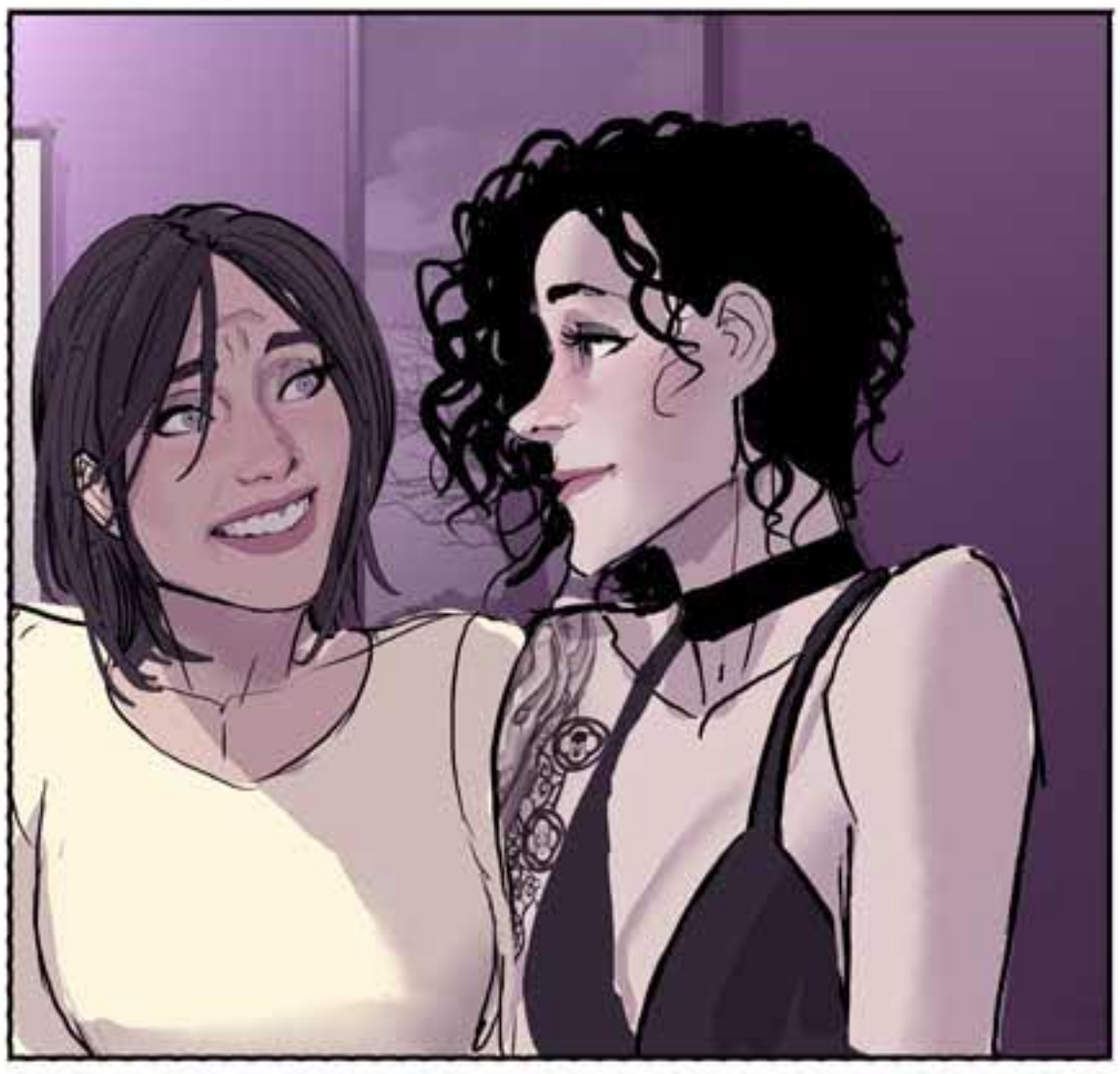
TRANSLATION: "DON'T YOU MEAN KISS IT BETTER?"

YOU KNOW ON A AN ENTIRELY UNRELATED NOTE I WAS THINKING OF GETTING ONE... YOU KNOW....
DOWN THERE!

NOT IMPLYING ANYTHING.
MHM...


SO I'M NEW TO ALL OF THIS...
IS THIS LIKE LESBIAN SPEAK FOR: "JUST PUT ON THE CONDOM AND GET BUSY"?

WELL... I MEAN NOT A CONDOM... BUT I GOT LATEX GLOVES AND SOME DENTAL DAMS



WHAT!?

YOU KNOW... PROTECTION!

MARIANNE? YOU OKAY?

WHAT? OH, YEAH NO, I JUST HAD THE STRANGEST URGE TO CALL MY DAD JUST NOW...

UH, WHAT?

LONG STORY... THO SERIOUSLY? THERE'S ACTUAL PROTECTION?

HEH! YEAH... TRUST ME I WAS JUST AS SURPRISED.

REMEMBER MY LAST GIRLFRIEND?

THE PIXIE?

YEAH... WELL I TOLD YOU SHE CHEATED ON ME. WELL AFTER THAT I HAD SOME... TRUST ISSUES.

ONE OF THEM BEING THE VERY REAL FEAR OF THE LITTLE BITCH INFECTING ME WITH SOME SHIT SHE MIGHT HAVE PICKED UP RIDING ON RANDOM DICKS

SO I GOT MYSELF TESTED FOR EVERYTHING AND THE KITCHEN SINK. I GOT A NICE OB-GYN... SHE ALSO GAVE ME A BUNCH OF SAFE SEX TIPS AND HERE WE ARE...

I'M GUESSING THIS TALK PRETTY MUCH MADE YOU DRYER THAN THE SAHARA?

HOLD THAT THOUGHT!

NOPE. STILL GOOD!

KHEHEHEH!

SO... OKAY, I GET THE GLOVES, BUT... THE FUCK IS THE DENTAL DAM?

CAUSE... I'LL PLAY DOCTOR WITH YOU ANY DAY OF THE WEEK BUT I DRAW THE LINE AT DENTIST!

PFFFT!!!

AAAND A FEW MOMENTS LATER...

SO A DENTAL DAM IS A SQUARE PIECE OF LATEX THAT YOU PUT LIKE A BLANKET OVER THE PUSSY AND YOU... UM... LICK THE LATEX?

LAURA... YOU ARE INTO SOME WEIRD SHIT!

HEY! I JUST GOT THE FUCKING THING! I NEVER ACTUALLY USED IT!

UHUH...

HEY, LAURA?

DOEF FHIS TUWN WOU ON?

BWAHAHAHAHAHHAAH

HEHEH... HEH...
OKAY. CARDS ON THE TABLE
I AM ABSOLUTELY CLEAN SO
YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY
ABOUT THAT.

OKAY... FAIR
ENOUGH

MY LAST TIME
WAS ABOUT A YEAR AGO
AND I'M 99% SURE I
DEFLOWERED THE
GUY.

USED
PROTECTION
HAD NO PROBLEMS.
SO I'D SAY IT'S ALL
GOOD ON MY END
AS WELL.

OKAY...
THEN...

NOT GONNA LIE. WHAT I
THOUGHT OF SAYING WAS:
"I GUESS, NO DAMS,
JUST THE BEAVERS!"

I'M GLAD I DIDN'T
SAY THAT.

THEN?

THEN HOW ABOUT
YOU AND ME HOWL
AT THE NIGHT?

GOD THAT WAS
CHEESY.

AND YOU
KNOW WHAT?

I LOVED IT!

EVERY SILLY MOMENT...

...EVERY AWKWARD MOMENT...

...EVERY DELICIOUSLY SENSUAL MOMENT!

I LOVED THEM ALL

AND MORE THAN ALL OF IT ...

I LOVED HER!

I THOUGHT IT EVERY TIME SHE SMILED

FIVE CONCERTS AND A BAD DATE AND I FUCKING *LOVE YOU!*

YOU KNOW IT JUST OCCURED TO ME, I COULD ACTUALLY PUT SOME MUSIC ON IF YOU

WANT...

WHAT?

I...

I'M SORRY... I'M JUST... SPEECHLESS

LIKE, I'M LITERALLY TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO SAY...

BETTER NOT BE ANOTHER AGE JOKE. I HAD HAIR THERE EARLIER THIS EVENING YOU KNOW!

WELL, THEN. I FOR ONE APPRECIATE THE GESTURE!

AFTER ALL, NOBODY LIKES HAIR IN THEIR DINNER!

PAST THAT POINT I DIDN'T DO MUCH THINKING. ROMANTIC OR OTHERWISE.

I WAS TOO BUSY TRYING TO HANG ON FOR DEAR LIFE AND WITHSTAND HURRICANE LAURA.

CATEGORY: HOLY FUCK!

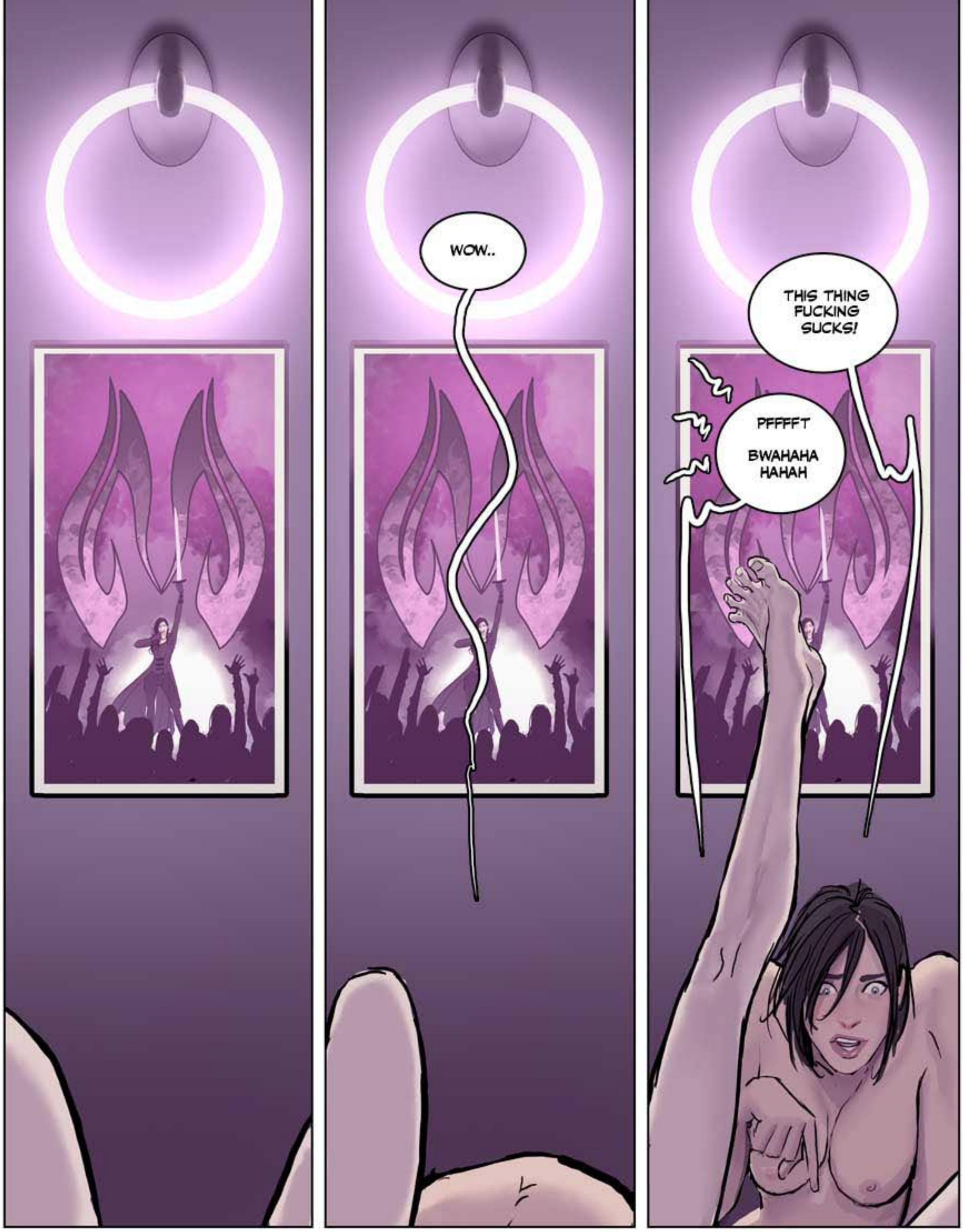
OH, WAIT! ACTUALLY THIS WILL BE IMPORTANT MUCH LATER!

SO, IT WAS MY TURN TO RETURN THE FAVOR, AND...

ARE YOU SURE?

I HAVE TO!

FOR SCIENCE!


WOW..
THIS THING FUCKING SUCKS!
PFFFFT
BWAHAHA HAHAH

IN HINDSIGHT IT TRULY WAS AN UNLIKELY ROMANCE

SUCH AN UNLIKELY FRIENDSHIP...

AND IT ALL STARTED THE DAY I TOOK THAT PHOTO OF HER...

OUR CRAZY JOURNEY DOWN AN UNCHARTED PATH..

IT WAS EXHILARATING!

MARIA AWE

IT WAS EXCITING

IT WAS... UNEXPECTED...

INTENSE...

AND, MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE... IT WAS WONDERFUL

IT FELT LIKE OUR VERY OWN HAPPY ENDING

BUT THE THING WITH LIFE IS... UNLIKE THE STORIES, YOU ACTUALLY GET TO LIVE THE NEXT PART.

THE EVER AFTER...

AND AS IT TURNS OUT WHETHER OR NOT THAT'S HAPPY KINDA DEPENDS ON YOU.

YEAH. THE EVER AFTER PART IS A MESSY BUSINESS. IT'S LIFE'S GREAT EXTENDED POST CREDITS SCENE AFTER YOU JUST GOT DONE WITH YOUR HAPPY ENDING. AND YES! IT MORE OFTEN THAN NOT ALSO CONTAINS THE BLOOPER REEL.

A SHAVING RASH... ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?

OH! HEY, LAURA.

HEY! WHAT'CHA DOING?

SIGH... YOU KNOW... TALKING TO YOU, AND TOUCHING MYSELF.

WHAT'S UP? I THOUGHT WE WERE MEETING AT FIVE?

YEAH, UH ACTUALLY I'M CALLING TO TAKE A RAINCHECK ON THAT.

OH?

YEAH TURNS OUT LOOKING HOT DOESN'T REALLY PROTECT YOU FROM THE COLD. I CAME FOR OUR DATE A BIT UNDERDRESSED AND AM...*KOFF* PAYING THE PRICE NOW

DAMN... I GOTTA SAY, YOUR VOICE IS ACTUALLY SEXIER NOW...

A SMALL UPSIDE... WITH A FEVER FOR A DOWNSIDE...

SAY NO MORE...

EVER AFTER WILL TEST YOUR RESOLVE.

MARIANNE?

IT'S NURSE MARIANNE TODAY!

UH... OKAY, NURSE MARIANNE...

WHAT'S WITH THE WEIRD WALK?

UGH

SO YOU KNOW HOW I SHAVED DOWN THERE?

YEAH?

WELL, NOW IM PAYING THE PRICE FOR IT!

PFFFTBWAHA HAH HACK COUGH

IT WILL TEST YOUR DEVOTION TO EACH OTHER...

...BUT IN THE END IF YOU TRULY LOVE THE PERSON, IF THEY ARE WORTH IT. YOU WILL FIGHT FOR YOUR EVER AFTER TO BE A HAPPY ONE!

TRUTH WAS... I DID LOVE HER

FUN, GORGEOUS, EQUAL PARTS EXCITING, AND VULNERABLE.

IT'S KINDA FUNNY THO!

WHAT IS?

AND CAPABLE OF SAYING THE ABSOLUTELY WORST THINGS AT THE WORST TIME!

THE DAY AFTER I GO DOWN ON YOU I GET SICK AND YOU GET A CROTCH ITCH !

I FUCKING KNEW IT!

UNIVERSE, GIVE ME STRENGTH NOT TO CHOKE OUT MY GIRLFRIEND!

SHE WAS MY HAPPY ENDING.

MY FIRST HAPPY ENDING.

WHAT FOLLOWED, IS A STORY OF OUR EVER AFTER. AND IT WAS A *WILD* ONE!

YEAH... EVEN WITH ALY AND ME, IT DEFINITELY HAD A HAPPY ENDING WRITTEN ALL OVER IT.

IT WASN'T ROMANTIC. NEVER THAT, BUT IT FELT REAL. IT FELT IMPORTANT TO THE TWO OF US.

SURE... WE WERE WALKING A STRANGE PATH BUT WE FELT STRONGER FOR WALKING IT TOGERHER

SO... TUESDAY?

I CAN'T...

BUSY?

PERIOD...

UNLESS YOU'RE THAT DESPERATE

PASS!

WAIT, YOU CAN DO IT DURING?

HEY... SOMETIMES I FIND A REALLY HOT STORY, AND THINGS HAPPEN!

BLOODY HELL!

BY THE WAY, YOU WERE AMAZING LAST NIGHT!

AW, THANKS!

I MEAN IT. I WAS CHOKING HARD! YOU REALLY SAVED THE WHOLE SESSION!

YOU MAKE A DAMN GOOD SUB.

IMMA MAKE AN EVEN BETTER DOMME

IN THE END, OUR EVER AFTER WAS A JOURNEY.

I WAS A GUY WHO HAD NO IDEA WHERE I WANTED TO GO

SHE WAS THE GIRL WHO REFUSED TO ADMIT SHE KNEW WHERE SHE WANTED TO GO

SO, THAT'S YOUR LEANING?

WHAT? NO! I JUST THINK I'D BE GOOD AT IT.

HEY, I DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM WITH YOU BEING NATURALLY DOMINANT...

WE WERE TWO WANDERERS MAKING OUR OWN ROAD

AND WE WERE JUST GETTING STARTED.

YEAH.. SPEAKING OF PROBLEMS, WE'LL HAVE TO WORK ON YOUR LITTLE PROBLEM

UGH...

YEAH...

GONNA HAVE TO RESEARCH ORGASM DENIAL

FUN!

SO... UH... MY TURN WE COULD DO IT ON THE TWENTY SECOND?

WHY NOT TWENTY FOURTH?

OH... SO THAT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY GIFT TO ME?

NOPE... I GOT ONE BETTER

BY THE WAY... GIVEN ANY THOUGHTS ON YOUR SAFEWORD

YEAH...

SUNSTONE!

...

SO THAT'S LIKE A TEMPORARY SAFEWORD OR?

OH YOU ARE SO FUCKED!

HEH! YES, MISTRESS!